

A  
STAR TREK  
FANZINE

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Hello everyone, and welcome to this first issue of IDIC LOG - the first, we hope, of many. We hope we enjoy it.

Most of the contributors are known to readers of ENTERPRISE - LOG ENTRIES. I think S.L. Ayers and Gillian Runcie are the only ones making their first, and very welcome, appearance in one of our zines.

Regular readers of E - LOG ENTRIES know that we have a fairly tight policy with regard to story content; as a result, we have had to reject some very well-written stories because they did not meet that policy. For IDIC LOG we are - in accordance with the name - operating a much wider policy for it; anything except explicit sex will be considered - even on themes we don't like, because we know that other fans do like these themes. We feel that explicit sex, however, is a theme better left to editors who put out adult zines.

What this does mean, however, is that this zine contains a short story in which one of the main characters dies. We had originally intended to mark it as a death story, to warn readers who don't like the theme. It was then pointed out to us that this might spoil the story for readers who don't mind the theme - in other words, if X is badly hurt, will he or will he not recover? Will he die? For them, knowing that he does die is taking away the suspense. We decided that the best thing to do was to put the warning here and not naming the story, this time at least. We would welcome your comments on this subject; would you or would you not prefer to be warned?

So far, all the TNG stories that we've been sent have been sent for inclusion in ScoTpress's MAKE IT SO. If enough are sent to IDIC to make up a zine, they will come out as an IDIC LOG, TNG edition - we don't plan to mix original Trek and TNG in one zine. We're also planning that all novels put out by IDIC will appear as issues of IDIC LOG, subtitled by their names.

TNG has provided us with a small problem. Where are we to put cross-series stories - in a zine with original Trek or in one with TNG? So far, we've put them in MAKE IT SO, but at least one reader felt that she bought MAKE IT SO to read about Picard and Co., not Kirk and Spock. We took her point; but on the other hand, although it's fairly likely that fans who like TNG also like original Trek, not everyone who likes original Trek accepts TNG. It has occurred to us that the best compromise would be to put the story in an original Trek zine if it was predominately about Kirk and his crew, and in MAKE IT SO if it was primarily about Picard and his crew. Again, we'd welcome your comments.



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# CARILLON ENTERPRISE

## ALPHA

by

David Gomm

Captain's Log Stardate 6161.6

This Log Entry has previously been restricted to the Top Security Log. Only now has permission been received for its transfer to the General Data Banks.

For the record, the sequence of events related took place on and after Stardate 5920.1, some months prior to the entry for 5952.3. sometimes referred to as 'The Which of Hendau'.

"Have you got a minute, Jim?"

Captain James T. Kirk looked up from the writing desk in his cabin. "Sure, Bones. Come in and sit down. You look as if you were off duty and could use a drink."

Dr. Leonard McCoy sank gratefully into the regulation Starfleet visitor's armchair. "Ship's Chief Medical Officers are never off duty," he said wearily. "And yes, I could use a drink."

"Then I have just the prescription." Kirk poured two generous tots of Romulan brandy from a bottle 'liberated' from the same Romulan ship as the cloaking device. "I keep it for emergencies. What's on your mind, Bones?"

Dr. McCoy took a good-sized mouthful of the blood-red liqueur brandy, savoured it, and allowed its mellowing warmth to caress the parts lesser brandies cannot reach. When he answered the question, it was with another.

"How long do you think this can go on, Jim?"

"Explain."

McCoy took another pull at the brandy.

"You have the finest First Officer in Starfleet."

"Mr. Spock. I agree. And the finest Science Officer."

"Exactly my point. Spock is holding down two jobs single-handed, either one of which would severely tax a lesser man. No other major ship in Starfleet combines the two posts. The strain is more than could be expected of anybody. It's - inhuman."

"Mr. Spock isn't Human." Kirk pointed out.

"Not entirely, no. Nor is he totally Vulcan. And if you want to cause a schism you're going the right way about it. He's getting more Human by the day. Only yesterday he compared my bedside manner with that of Dr. Crippen."

"He's done that before," Kirk reminded him.

"Not in front of a patient."

"Yeoman La Neve, I presume?"

"As it happens, yes. How did you know?"

"Vulcans don't have a monopoly in logic, Doctor. They just think they have. Why don't you order him to indent for a Deputy Science Officer? He's quite entitled to one."

"D'you think I haven't tried? But he won't hear of it. He's as stubborn as a mule - and that, I would remind you, is another Human characteristic."

Kirk took the first sip of his own drink.

"Don't worry, Bones. Things will sort themselves out, mark my words."

McCoy put down his empty glass. "Yes, but how, dammit, how?"

Kirk grinned broadly. "Logically, Bones, logically. How else?" He raised his voice in response to a second knock on the cabin door. "Come!"

If McCoy had been agitated, Lt. Commander Montgomery Scott was positively boiling. He declined a Romulan brandy but gratefully accepted a large scotch, tossing most of it back at a gulp.

"And what's on your mind, Scotty?" Kirk asked when the Chief Engineer was calm enough to be coherent.

"It's that new bunch of Engineering Probs, Cap'n. If they're let loose on my engines for much longer I won't be answerable for the consequences. Thomas is clumsy, Miss Pawson's all left thumbs and M'Gumba's just plain careless. And as for yon great ox Potato, he's all three rolled into - three!"

"Let's have a look." Kirk touched a button and the view on the cabin monitor switched to the interior of the Engineering Section. Instantly, Scott was on the boil again, his face a mixture of rage and outrage. In the centre of the picture a tall, immensely powerful young man was juggling - there was no other word for it - with a couple of perfect dilithium crystals. Just as they seemed about to shatter in fragments on the floor there was a flash of red as someone from outside the picture dived into it, caught them deftly and placed them neatly in their holders.

"Yon's Potato," Scott snarled savagely.

Jim Kirk smiled his famous half-smile. "I - er - guessed that, Mr. Scott. Let's see who it was saved your crystals for you."

The camera panned round, focussing on a young woman in her twenties, wearing an engineering-red dress whose arm bore two very thin blue bands. The bands were broken, denoting a civilian

carrying Petty Officer status. She had an unruly mop of light brown hair, a neat but determined chin and the minutest of bumps at the bridge of her nose. Her lips were slightly parted with concentration as she delicately fitted a slim gallium antimonide relay into the backup computer for the matter/antimatter balancing system.

"That's Miss Pawson?"

"Och no, Cap'n. I'd no' let that one near the antimatter controller. No, yon's our T.I. trainee. Name of Kinshaw. She's bright. Specialises in Computer Psychology, but she's a better programmer than anyone aboard, except Mr. Spock. And she can turn her hand to half a dozen other sciences."

Dr. McCoy's face lit up. "Are you thinking what I'm thinking, Jim?"

"I'm way ahead of you, Bones. But - "

"I know. How the blue blazes do we get him to agree?"

The last of the self-healing circuits flowed its atoms into place.

"Unit installed - under test - tested - and functioning," reported the damage control program, speaking with the voice of the ship's master computer. Only then did Miss Kinshaw look up from what she was doing.

"Sorry, Mike, what were you saying?"

Patiently, Ensign (Probationary) Michael Potato repeated his question.

"This Technical Inspectorate you belong to, Miss. I mean - what is it?"

"It's the civilian science branch. We're associated with Starfleet but not actually part of it. We do two years training at Starfleet Academy and two more at T.I. University. In between, we get familiarisation trips. This is my final one before I pass out Junior Sub-Inspector."

Potato wasn't enlightened.

"Yes, Miss. But what do you actually do?"

"Well - for a start we provide specialist Technical and Scientific assistance anywhere in the Galaxy where it's needed. Then we have the final say in all Starfleet science appointments. Sometimes we even supply Science Officers for Fleet duty. USS Challenger's Science Officer is a T.I. Inspector. So is the Remington's D.S.O. - that's Deputy Science Officer. But we're still civilians, even when serving with the Fleet. Makes it easier for us to be accepted in politically sensitive - "

A strident clamour cut in on her, drowning out the rest of the sentence, until itself cut by the voice of Uhura, announcing, "Yellow Alert. All stations go to Yellow Alert!"

"Status report, Mr. Spock."

"One Klingon vessel, Captain. Approaching at warp speed and on a collision course. Preliminary sensor readings suggest that the Klingon is damaged and not answering to the helm."

"Evasive action, Mr. Sulu."

"Already programmed, Captain. Evasion will commence at 100000 kilometres distance."

"Very well. Once manoeuvre completed, match the Klingon's course and speed. Activate all shields."

"All shields active, sir. Evasive action commencing - now. Completed - now. Course and speed matched, sir."

"Thank you, Mr. Sulu. Mr. Spock, do we have identification yet?"

"Affirmative, Captain. The fingerprint bank shows her to be the Kni''iyg - nearest Standard English translation, 'Wild Eagle'. Commander - King."

"Hailing frequency open, sir," reported Uhura, without having to be asked.

"This is Captain James T Kirk of the USS Enterprise. Enterprise calling Kni''iyg. Do you require assistance?"

The Kni''iyg's only response was a brace of torpedoes which, thanks to the Klingon's uncontrollable yawing, passed harmlessly in front of the Enterprise.

"Kni''iyg." Kirk's voice was noticeably chillier. "I was not aware that any state of war existed between us. I say again, do you require assistance?"

The face of the Klingon commander filled the main screen. He was deathly pale and obviously in great pain. This, coupled with the natural metallic sheen of the Klingon complexion, made him look like a bronze bust whose metallic substance has been removed, leaving only a collapsing veneer of outer tarnish.

"No, Captain? Then I suggest you tell that to the USS Peregrine. It has destroyed - my ship - we are lost."

Motioning Uhura to interrupt the hailing frequency, Kirk said interrogatively to Spock, "I don't know a USS Peregrine?"

"Nor I, Captain. But I will run a check nonetheless."

Kirk turned back to the screen. "What is your status, Commander? Maybe we can help."

King laughed hoarsely. "Nothing can help us now, Captain. Our antimatter containment systems are damaged beyond repair. Single atoms of antimatter are already contaminating the fabric of the ship and the diffusion rate is increasing. We are now seconds from destruction. But our fate has been reported to High Command. We shall be avenged."

"Commander." Spock spoke quietly but insistently. "I have

double checked our data banks. There is no such ship as the USS Peregrine."

"You lie."

"Vulcans never lie, Commander," said Spock evenly.

"But Humans do," King spat viciously, " - halfbreed! You see, I know all about you, Mr. Spock. Nobody lies to King and lives."

As he spoke the distance between the two ships began to close rapidly.

"Resume evasive action, Mr. Sulu."

"She's not responding, Captain. They've got a tractor beam on us."

"Scotty."

"Here, Captain," came over the direct link to Engineering.

"Can you give us more power?"

"Not without lowering the shields, sir. And if she blows at this range we'll need all the protection we can get."

"Phasers locked and ready, Captain."

Kirk hesitated. One sure way to start a war would be to fire on a crippled and unshielded ship.

"Another ten thousand kilometers and she'll take us with her," warned Scott. "Shields or no shields."

That settled it. "Very well. Prepare to fire. Fire!"

But even as Sulu's finger reached for the button the Kni'iyg disintegrated in a blinding flash of pure energy.

"Damage reports, Lieutenant."

"Aye, sir." Expertly Uhura ran through the status check channels. "Shields held, sir. All decks report minimal damage... Captain - I'm picking up another signal. Strength two. It sounds like a Romulan."

"Put it on audio, Lieutenant."

There was a crackle of static, then the calm voice of a Romulan Commander filled the bridge. "... attack by a Federation Starship. I repeat, we have been under attack by a Federation Starship. Stand by to receive visual evidence. Transmitting in fifteen seconds from - now."

"Uhura, can you intercept that video?"

"I'll try, sir." A pause. Triumphant, "Got it!"

The picture quality was very poor; the attacking vessel appeared to be firing its phasers through a snowstorm. But the lines of a Constitution Class Starship were unmistakable and the legend on her superstructure was crystal clear. It read: NCC-1820.

USS PEREGRINE.

Kirk's face was grim. "You know what this means, gentlemen?"

"Indeed, Captain. Since the ship we saw was indisputably a Federation Starship and yet there is no Peregrine in the Starfleet list, there can be only one logical explanation. We have a rogue in the fleet. One of our ships has gone amok!"

Which only went to show how wrong logic can be.

"The USS Falcon was reported missing, Mr. Spock."

"So it was, Mr. Chekov."

"Falcon - Peregrine," mused Chekov. "It must be her. It's a dead certainty."

"Kindly be precise, Mr. Chekov. Mathematically, the probability is 80.46%."

Which didn't do much for the mathematics of probability either.

"They really are that bad, Scotty?"

"Aye, sir, that they are."

"Very well. I'll see them now."

The four Probationary Ensigns marched into the Captain's day cabin, halted in front of him and stood before him, rigidly to attention.

"Miss Pawson. Gentlemen. Mr. Scott has reported to me that you are not making satisfactory progress in your duties. It is his opinion that you will not reach the standards required by Engineering Division - and I am sorry to say that I agree with him.

"However, I am satisfied that your general demeanour is in keeping with what I expect from my junior officers. I have therefore decided to confirm your commissions as Ensigns. Miss Pawson will be assigned to Communications, M'Gumba to Navigation, Potato and Thomas to Security."

Ensign Thomas might have been less than enthusiastic about this sudden and drastic reduction in his life expectancy, but Potato seemed positively jubilant. He even went so far as to forget discipline and to boldly shake his Captain's hand in a bone-crushing grip.

"Thank ye, sorr. I knew there'd been a terrible mistake when they assigned me. I told them I wanted to wear the red jersey, but they sent me to Engineering."

Kirk disengaged himself as best he could. "I'm - er - glad you're pleased, Ensign. That will be all." And to Scott - "I'll see Kinshaw now."

"Miss Kinshaw," he began as the newly confirmed Sub-Inspector

came to attention, rather self-consciously. "How would you like to take off that red dress?"

Miss Kinshaw's mind boggled briefly, but then she saw Scott trying not to laugh as the Captain went on, "And substitute it with a blue one?"

Grey eyes turned to starry blue ones. "You mean - working with Mr. Spock?"

"That is the usual job of a Deputy Science Officer."

Miss Kinshaw would have liked to jump for joy, but forced herself to say calmly, "Thank you, sir. I'd like that very much."

"Then perhaps you would like to give Mr. Spock my compliments and ask him if he could spare me a minute. And Miss Kinshaw - "

"Yes, sir?"

"Before changing. If you follow me."

"Captain," said Spock a few minutes later, when he had been told the news. "As I have had occasion to remind you before, I have no feelings to hurt. It might, however, have been more logical to consult me over the choice of a Deputy. Especially since none is needed."

"That's exactly it, Mr. Spock. Neither Dr. McCoy nor I was prepared to be argued by perfect logic out of a course of action which we both know here to be right." Kirk tapped the region from which a gut feeling might have been supposed to emanate.

"I have no objection to the young woman in question," Spock went on. "I have observed her to be most - competent. Despite the fact that, even by Human standards, her logical quotient makes Dr. McCoy look like a Vulcan."

Kirk repressed a smile.

"I'm sure you'll train her well, Mr. Spock. Besides, some of the greatest breakthroughs in science have been intuitive - and she's not short on that, by all accounts. It should be an interesting contest."

"Fascinating," agreed Spock drily.

The USS Marauder looked what she was; a swift, efficient, deadly fighting machine. Her sleek, predatory lines bore more than a passing resemblance to a Klingon battle cruiser, so much so that more than one embarrassed Starship Captain had taken his ship's status all the way to Red Alert before finally identifying her. She had been laid down at a time when a major conflict with the Klingon Empire had seemed inevitable, but by the time she was completed the crisis had passed. She had been relegated to a role as a flying test bed for new weaponry, and as a home-grown 'enemy flagship' for battle exercises. Now at last it looked as though she might be called upon to show her full capabilities.

"Two to beam over, Mr. Scott. Have them shown direct to the bridge."

"Aye, sir. They'll be with you in one minute."

Captain Welles de Fargo was a tall, thin man with a Louisiana drawl. He had been promoted Captain some six weeks before Kirk, and would therefore outrank him for as long as they both remained captains. Kirk greeted him warmly.

"Welles. Good to see you again." Then, much less warmly, "Dr. Daystrom. I trust you are fully recovered - "

"From my breakdown?" Dr. Daystrom's rich, melodious voice was as self-confident as ever. "Thank you, yes. The condition was purely temporary." He set the bulky package he was carrying down on the desk.

"Jee-um," began de Fargo. "Ah want y'all to reconsideruh."

"About the M6X? Thank you for the offer, but no. Forgive me, Dr. Daystrom, but I still have nightmares when I remember our experience with the M5."

"There is nothing to forgive, Captain Kirk. The M5 was flawed. But the true greatness of science is to profit from mistakes and thereby rectify them. The M7 - you will appreciate this, Mr. Spock - the M7, like its predecessor, simulates true thought processes by being encoded with the patterns of a living brain. But instead of a Human mind, with its inherent emotional weakness, the M7 embodies the mind of a Vulcan."

"Think of it, Jee-um." Captain de Fargo's face was alight with enthusiasm. "Perfect logical thought, instantaneously on tap. Ah've had that li'l beauty on my ship for six months now, and I tell yuh it's the greatest thing since Deltan aphrobread."

"Unfortunately," Dr. Daystrom went on, "there is still only one model of the M7 in existence." ("For which we are truly thankful," muttered Chekov.) "But the M6X is one of the prototype components which went into its development. Its function is to act as a thought interface between the ship's animate and inanimate brain system. Its effect is to enhance and advance logical thought, which diminishing and retarding the illogical. The timescale is a few microseconds only - but in a battle situation that few microseconds can mean the difference between victory and defeat. Captain, can I not persuade you to give it a trial?"

As Kirk shook his head, so Captain de Fargo sadly shook his own.

"Ah'm sorry you feel that way, Jee-um. Ah didn't want t' have t' do this. Ah'm ord'rin' you to try out the M6X."

"Captain," interrupted Sulu urgently, "I have contact with an intruder. Extreme range but closing fast. I think she's a Klingon." As he spoke, an insistent clamour from the Marauder over the hailing frequency showed that she too had detected the approaching vessel.

"Identification, Mr. Spock?"

"Negative, Captain. She is unknown to the fingerprint bank."

"Visual as soon as you can, Mr. Sulu. Mr. Spock, please concentrate all sensors on a status report. She may be another victim."

"I've got her on visual, sir." Sulu flipped the switch and the picture on screen changed from a close-up of the Marauder to a distant shot of the approaching Klingon.

"Concentrate on her name, Mr. Sulu. I need that identification fast."

It took a little while, but eventually the name came into view, to be read out letter by letter as the extreme range camera panned across the top of her bridge. K.R.I.I.G.R.' N.N. Kriigr'nn.

"Interesting," said Spock. "In fact - most interesting."

"How so, Mr. Spock?"

"Because, Captain, the nearest translation we have for the word 'Kriigr'nn' is - Peregrine."

"Central Computing to Bridge."

"Yes, Miss Kinshaw?"

"I'm getting incoming sensor readings. Just a touch. She seems to be scanning the Marauder. And - oh golly!"

Spock returned hurriedly to his own sensor console, but it showed nothing unusual.

"Tell me what you observed, Miss Kinshaw."

"I thought I saw - But it couldn't have been."

Such an illogical and incomplete statement would not normally have passed without comment, but all thoughts about what the D.S.O. might or might not have seen were purged from the Bridge as the Kriigr'nn seemed literally to dissolve - only to re-form in the image of a Federation Starship. Bearing the name: USS Peregrine.

Red alerts sounded on both Enterprise and Marauder.

"De Fargo to Marauder. Give me Monsieur Choufleur."

"Ici, M. le Capitain," came the prompt response of Marauder's Chief Engineer.

"Beam me 'cross direct from heah, on mah say-so. Y'all have mah co-ordinates?"

"But of course, M'sieu."

De Fargo turned to Kirk. "We will engage the enemy, Jee-um. I want t' capture her intact, so be prepared to fire but don't shoot until I do. Rich, y'all stay here. Make sure yo' little ol' box of tricks gets a fair shake, now, y'hear?" And before Kirk could protest, "Energise."

The hour which followed saw a complicated game of cat and

mouse, with Captain de Fargo seeming first to engage the Peregrine, then pulling sharply away, with the Enterprise in echelon formation behind him. His tactic, which Kirk had to agree made sense, was to buy time to examine the mystery ship, to try to make contact with her commander, and also to allow Dr. Daystrom to tie the M6X in to the Enterprise's systems. It would have been a good plan if it had worked.

Suddenly tiring of the game, the Peregrine lashed out with its phasers, whip-like, as if trying to goad the Marauder into positive action.

"Heave to." The Marauder's hailing frequency, though aimed at the Peregrine, sounded clearly aboard the Enterprise. "Heave to, y'all, or ah fire."

The only answer was a salvo of photon torpedoes which severely buckled the Marauder's forward shields.

The time had come for the battle cruiser to demonstrate her fearsome striking power. A scythe of phaser fire fanned out in all directions in front of her, while from below the phaser banks powerful anti-gravitational rays acted on the phasers, bending photon streams in their flight path, so that they raked the entire length of the Peregrine. A split second before they struck - a microsecond before they even fired - the Peregrine seemed to exude mirrors; mirrors of energy, without form or substance, but of immense power. The deadly photon beams deflected, reflected and ripped through the Marauder's own shields like so much tinfoil, striking the unprotected ship square amidships. Then she was debris.

"Hard a-port, Mr. Sulu."

"Aye, sir." Sulu's reaction was lightning but the manoeuvre, instead of taking her into a position of comparative safety, almost caused the Enterprise's downfall. Once again anticipating her enemy's move, the Peregrine put up a wall of phaser fire, directly in her path, stripping the shields and sapping the main engines with a power surge.

There was nothing for it but flight, hoping to lure the Peregrine towards reinforcements, but with the warp drive restricted the mystery attacker could close in any time she chose. Strangely, though, she seemed content to shadow the Enterprise at a discreet, respectful distance.

Then:

"Spock to D.S.O."

"Here, sir."

"Miss Kinshaw, is that what you saw?"

"Yes, sir!" (Excitedly.)

"Evaluate."

"There are life forms aboard her, Mr. Spock, but the ship - it seems to be alive as all."

"More than that, Miss Kinshaw. That vessel is composed of

myriad life forms, each consisting not of matter but of pure logic."

As if to confirm his words, the Peregrine dissolved once more - and metamorphosed into the Klingon Kriigr'nn.

"That being the case," Spock went on, "our position is most perilous. Captain, may I recommend that you have the M6X disengaged at once?"

"I don't understand you." Dr. Daystrom was beginning to show the tell-tale sings of stress.

"Then I shall explain. That vessel is able to scan us for logic patterns. The more logical our procedure the more accurately she is able to anticipate our moves, and counter them. It grieves me to say so, but this is a case for - Miss Kinshaw, what was that phrase you used?"

"Contra-logic, sir."

"Then if you have any contra-logical ideas, now is the time to voice them."

The D.S.O. made up her mind. "Captain, I'd like permission to try something."

"Go on, Miss Kinshaw."

"That's just it, sir. I can't. If you and the others know about it, it won't work."

"Miss Kinshaw, that statement is, even for you, most ill..." Spock broke off in mid-sentence. "Ah!"

"Just what you said was needed, eh, Mr. Spock." Jim Kirk could still smile, even in moments of extreme crisis. "All right, Miss Kinshaw, go ahead. As quickly as you like."

"One more thing, sir..."

"Well?"

"I'd like to borrow the M6X. Sort of... permanently!"

Ensigns Thomas and Potato were despatched to escort the M6X unit to D.S.O. Kinshaw in the Central Processor room. Dr. Daystrom followed them, still protesting vigorously. Minute followed anxious minute, growing into an anxious hour, as still the Peregrine made no move. Then at last, just as it had done with the Marauder, the Peregrine seemed to become bored. The distance between the two ships began closing rapidly.

And at that precise moment Mr. Spock wailed, "Captain, I'm frightened."

In theatrical terms, the comical change-of-expression is known as a double-take. The take which Mr. Spock executed was a quadruple one. If surprise had been classed as an emotion he would have forfeited all claim to Vulcan citizenship on the spot.

"Fascinating!" exclaimed Captain Kirk.

Odd though Mr. Spock's behaviour was, there were more pressing matters to attend to.

"What's our speed, Mr. Sulu?"

"Warp two, Captain."

"Try and give us warp three."

Sulu looked anguished. "I canna do that, Cap'n. With the engines in this state she'll tear herself to pieces." He, too, gasped in astonishment at what he had heard himself say.

"Nonsense, Mr. Sulu," said Dr. McCoy from the bridge doors. "There's nothing ma engines canna pull us out of."

The elevator ejected him rudely and departed, reappearing with the two security ensigns and a furious Dr. Daystrom.

"That girl of yours, Mr. Spock," he began. "Do you know what she's done to my M6X? She's - "

He got no further. A single bolt of phaser fire, finely concentrated, ripped into the bridge. A flying piece of Visiplex, a foot long and razor sharp, neatly decapitated Ensign Thomas. His head rolled bumpily down the steps, while his trunk was smashed backwards into the elevator doors with such force that its imprint was left deep in the metal, then rebounded towards Communications, splattering Uhura with blood.

"He's dead, Keptin," said Dr. McCoy, wonderingly stating the obvious. And, simultaneously, "He's dead, Jim," said Chekov despairingly. Both did the same extraordinary 'take', then each looked at the other as if to say that's my line.

Kirk looked around for spare hands. Indicating the remains of the unfortunate Thomas, he said, "Dr. Daystrom. Potato. Please help Dr. McCoy to take him to sickbay."

Daystrom puffed himself up, angrily. "I'm a doctor, not a mortician."

Potato, unable to comprehend what had happened, stared blankly at the body of his erstwhile colleague. McCoy waved a hand in front of his face and announced, "I'm getting no response, Captain."

"That's an order, Dr. Daystrom," snapped Kirk. "Uhura, get Potato to sickbay and treated for shock. And have Nurse Chapel check you over as well. Pawson can take over here. You look - "

"Pale, Captain?" Uhura couldn't resist saying. "All right, come on, Spud. Lean on me."

No sooner had Ensign Pawson slipped into Uhura's vacant place than the Enterprise was rocked by a second blast from the Peregrine.

"We're under attack, Keptin," said Scott over the link from Engineering.

"So we are, Mr. Chek - Scott."

"Captain!" D.S.O. Kinshaw burst breathlessly onto the bridge. "Try a salvo of photon torpedoes now."

"Miss Kinshaw, you saw what happened to the Marauder. The course of action you suggest would be most - illogical."

"And therefore in the circumstances to be highly recommended, Captain," Spock pointed out.

"What? Why, so it would, Mr. Spock. Very well, on your own heads be it. Mr. Sulu, arm photon torpedoes. Fire as you bear."

"Photon torpedoes armed and running, sir." Even the D.S.O. seemed to have caught the general malaise as she reported the launching of the torpedoes Sulu-style. Then:

"Captain!" exclaimed Sulu. "Look at the Peregrine!"

This time the defensive-cum-retaliatory mechanism took the form of arms rather than mirrors. Something akin to a giant cricket bat swatted at the first of the torpedoes. Clearly the aim was to return it to sender, but at the last moment the Peregrine must have taken her eyes off the ball, because the missile flew harmlessly by, missing by a full twenty-degree angle. The second missile beat the bat completely, passed over the top of the Peregrine as she ducked just in time and exploded somewhere in the region of long stop.

"Sen-saws, Mr. Spock?"

"Fascinating," breathed Spock.

"Explain."

"The logic of which the Peregrine is composed appears to be breaking down. She seems to be - confused."

"Captain, may I?"

Jim Kirk shrugged helplessly. "All yours, Miss Kinshaw."

"Aye, aye, sir." She crossed to the Communications section, took over the microphone from a puzzled Ensign Pawson and cut in the main speakers. "Bridge to all decks. Attention all cricketers." English, Indians (both East and West), Australians and New Zealanders among the ship's multi-national crew pricked up their ears. "Now hear this. Imagine you are fielding at deep mid-on. Four to win and the last pair at the crease. The batsman hits a towering six. It's all over. But wait a minute..." (Aside, the D.S.O. whispered, "Another torpedo, Mr. Sulu. NOW!") "... he's mishit it. It's dropping just inside the boundary. It all depends on you. You're running. Running. You're under it. You stretch out your hand. You've CAUGHT it!"

"HOWZAT!" roared the Enterprise, in mighty unison.

The Peregrine, in the path of the third and last torpedo, threw aside its 'bat', stretched out a nebulous hand, fielded the running torpedo and held it triumphantly aloft.

And was rendered totally defenceless as its shields were blown to shreds.

"Phasers, Captain?" Sulu was already switching full power to

the main phaser banks.

"Phasers on stun, Mr. Sulu," said Spock.

Kirk, realising that Sulu had misinterpreted Spock's words as just another case of confused identity, said, "That's an order, Mr. Sulu," and, as Sulu looked puzzled, "to destroy an unknown life form unnecessarily, without even trying to make contact, is not the way of Starfleet."

"Aye, aye, sir. Phasers on stun."

"Prepare to fire."

"That will not be necessary, Captain."

Sulu's finger relaxed its pressure on the button. "Keptin, look."

The face of the Peregrine's commander had appeared on the forward screen, as his voice filled the ship. Both were inconceivably alien, but with such an aura of serenity that the ship itself seemed to sense that it had made a friend. "We will do you no harm, and we cannot be harmed, for although we are of matter we are matter created by telepathic projection."

"Who are you?"

"We are of the First Galaxy. Our mission is to seek out life forms in other, younger star systems and to monitor their progress towards true civilisation. Our method is to take the form of their deadliest enemies and observe their behaviour."

"And we pass the test?"

"We do not test, Captain. We observe."

"And you have observed... ?"

The alien paused, somewhat after the style of a computer sorting data. Then;

"I fear that those whose ships are of the form I now bear have a long road to travel."

Spock, fascinated, asked, "This First Galaxy?"

"From beyond the bounds of your known universe, Mr. Spock. One day - perhaps within your life span - you will begin to reach out to us. We shall have much to teach you. And, perhaps, to learn."

The Peregrine dissolved for a third and last time. And was gone.

"All right, Miss Kinshaw," said Kirk when all decks had been stood down from red alert. "Just what did you do to the M6X to give the good Dr. Daystrom such apoplexy?"

The D.S.O. looked convincingly innocent. "I only dumped its complete program suite into our computer's own logic banks," she

said. "Just as Dr. Daystrom recommended. Well," she amended as Spock's right eyebrow threatened to merge with his hairline, "not quite as he intended. I did add a little program of my own. I call it 'the Carillon Effect'.

"The Peregrine was clearly able to anticipate her adversaries' moves, by intercepting their thought patterns and extrapolating the logic forward. The better the logic, the better the projection.

"The first ship they met was the Klingon, Kni''iyg. Klingons aren't that logical, so King nearly got away with it. It's odds on he fired first, so after that anything that looked like a Klingon was fair game. The Romulan ship probably survived because their defences are better, but poor Captain de Fargo never had a chance. The Marauder not only looked like a Klingon, she was carrying the most perfect logic machine ever devised."

"But if the M6X was a miniature version of the M7," objected Chekov, ("Invented by a little old lady in Moscow?" mused Captain Kirk), "wouldn't that have made us vulnerable?"

The D.S.O. nodded vigorously. "Of course it would. Which was why I made it ILL-ogical. That was what Dr. Daystrom hated. The Carillon program scans the thought patterns of everyone in its vicinity, looking for pet phrases - everybody has them - "

"Don't they just," muttered Chekov, echoing one of the D.S.O.'s own.

" - and stores them in its data banks," the D.S.O. went on, ignoring the interruption. "Then it monitors the ship's status, using a special search frequency pattern, and every time one of those cliches fits the situation it sends out a trigger pulse causing it to be uttered - but by the wrong person. That generated enough confusion on the Enterprise - just imagine what it did to the poor old Peregrine! That got so confused that when at last I sent it one big coherent thought - CATCH THAT BALL - it simply couldn't resist it."

"What did I say about the value of intuition, Mr. Spock?"

"Indeed, Captain. I have never denied that intuition can be most valuable. In the correct circumstances. What interests me at the moment is why our own computer's logic did not become equally confused."

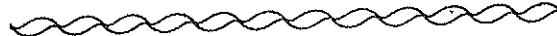
The D.S.O. was eager to explain.

"That's why I call it the Carillon Effect. The pulses are sent out to a set pattern, so our computer knows when to expect them - one which would never occur to a complete alien. The changes were rung exactly as though the M6X was masterminding a peal of bells. I had the computer look up campanology in the main data banks." Her voice turned suddenly very 'Spocky'. "I think you will agree that it was a devilishly fiendish campanological device."

"Hell's Bells!" exclaimed Kirk.

Even without the Carillon Effect, the D.S.O. could never have resisted such a perfect opening. She said sweetly,

"I believe I said that, Captain."



# LAST ORDERS?

by

Ann Neilson

"My fault, my fault!" said Spock to himself as he stood staring through the Sickbay window, his eyes never leaving the scene before him. McCoy had been operating for almost thirty minutes now and the tension was almost unbearable. The lights on the monitor flickered on and off; the readings were low, lower than they had ever been before.

"If only I had done as Jim said!" he berated himself.

Suddenly Sickbay was a flurry of action as the monitor slipped to zero.

"Cordrazine, 10 cc," ordered McCoy. Nurse Chapel thrust the prepared hypo into the doctor's hand. The hypo hissed, and all eyes watched in vain as the readings stayed at zero.

"Dead."

The word thundered in Spock's head as the feeling of guilt became even stronger, threatening his precarious hold on his control.

The door opened, and McCoy entered.

"Spock..." His voice faltered. A moment later he tried again. "Spock, I tried everything... heart massage, life support, I even tried cordrazine but... the internal damage was too great, there was massive haemorrhage."

Spock turned his back to the doctor, hiding his face which he knew showed the mental anguish he was feeling. "Are you sure you tried everything? Perhaps if you had been quicker..."

McCoy, overcome by tiredness, let his anger get the better of him as he interrupted. "What the hell do you mean?!" Spock's shoulders slumped and he relented. "I'm sorry. I guess I'm just tired. It's not your fault, Spock."

"Yes, it is, Doctor. If I had followed the Captain's orders this would not have happened and Jim..."

McCoy cut in again. "If it hadn't been Jim, it would have been someone else. You can't blame yourself."

"But I do. I do."

"It was an accident. Jim didn't even see it until he stood on it."

"The fault is still mine."

Unseen behind them the door opened. "You're damned right it

is, Mister!"

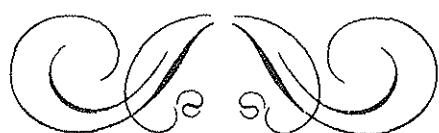
Spock spun on his heels. "Captain, I... "

"The next time I say I want every tribble off this ship, I mean yours too, Spock!" He turned and marched out leaving a rather guilty looking First Officer behind.

Spock turned and glared at McCoy as the doctor began to sing...

"Nobody knows the tribbles I've seen, nobody knows... "

Unable to take any more, he left for the sanity of his own cabin.



# A LIVELY SHORE LEAVE

by

Oriel Cooper

The door inched open and Commander Scott and Ensign Chekov peered cautiously through the small gap. No-one was in sight. They heaved a collective sigh of relief and patted each other on the back.

Scott eyed his young friend critically. "Laddie, y're a fine mess I can tell ye; wheesht, if y're mither c'l'd see ye now!"

"Mistair Scott," said Chekov with lopsided dignity, "You are werry dirty too. Your uniform is feelthy, and... and your face is... is dented, sair!"

"Aye, it was a grand fight!" enthused the Scotsman, hiccupping spasmodically. "Those Klingons didna' know what hit them. Fancy callin' ma wee bairns naething but nuts and bolts!" He paused to wipe a tear from his cheek. "And me carin' for them as if they were ma very own kin." He lurched and hit the doorframe with a loud thump.

"Sshh!" hissed Chekov fiercely, "or ve vill have all the local police here in a minute. Ve must be quiet like the Russian mouse in the story."

"Story?" queried Scott, bemused.

"Yes, sair, he kept wery, wery quiet so that the pussy cat vould not have him for his supper, after the mouse had drunk all the pussy cat's milk. Even the babushka did not know the mouse was there."

"Babushka?" asked an even more puzzled Engineer.

"Yes. You vould perhaps say 'grandma'..."

Realising that his companion was about to embark on what threatened to be a lengthy tale, Scott said hastily, "Aye, lad, I get y're meanin'."

They were both painfully aware that they had disobeyed their Captain's strict instructions, and might well have caused a diplomatic incident, not just with the Klingons but also with the mostly peaceful inhabitants of Sigma Ari III. Scott's thoughts returned to their arrival at this lovely planet, after a long, weary spell of space duty. He saw his Captain in his mind's eye, in his usual place on the Enterprise Bridge. Aware as always of the efficiency of his crew, in spite of their tiredness, Kirk had fastened his eyes on Scott at his Engineering console. The victim of his gaze had known that he was not going to escape shore leave planetside this time. Then Jim Kirk's attention had been distracted by a report by Lt. Sulu.

"Approaching Sigma Ari III now, sir. Entering geostationary orbit as per your previous orders."

"Thank you, Lieutenant. Mr. Scott, Ensign Chekov, as you are on the list for the first shore party I suggest you get ready to beam down," Kirk had stated firmly. Spock had lifted an immaculate eyebrow at the Engineer's expression.

"Aye, sir," both men had replied. Scott made as though to argue, but the steely glint in the Captain's eye forestalled any comment. He and an eager Pavel Chekov left the Bridge for their quarters.

As the first group gathered in the transporter room, Jim Kirk had sternly reminded them that this was a neutral planet they were going to. There was to be no trouble - even if they met up with hordes of angry Klingons! Scott and Chekov exchanged glances, both remembering what had happened on Space Station K7 when the same instructions had been given.

"At least there won't be any tribbles here," murmured Chekov, sotto voce, to Scott.

"Aye, lad. The wee beasties certainly caused a lot o' trouble," chuckled the Engineer. Then the transporter took them, drowning out any further comment from his friend.

Sigma Ari III was a lush planet, strongly reminiscent of Earth. Its main cities were immaculately kept and provided all the entertainment any space-weary crew member could wish for. Scott and Chekov found themselves wandering down a wide pavement under a hot yellow sun. Scott spotted a tavern that promised shade and, more importantly, refreshment.

"Let's hae a wee dram, laddie," he suggested, steering Pavel Chekov into the dim interior. "Scotch f'r me and vodka f'r ma friend here, if ye please," he said to the barman, who smiled and bowed to them as he filled their order. Collecting their glasses, they took a seat at one of the tables near the door.

Everything had been so peaceful and companionable. Scott quite forgot his objections to leaving his beloved engines to be checked by another. (He never felt easy doing this, even though his assistant had been well trained by himself and was fully capable of handling matters in his absence.) They had drunk quite a few rounds, each buying in turn, when Trouble had arrived in the shape of a large group of already well-lubricated Klingons, headed by their old adversary Korax. Scott heaved a sigh. Even without the assistance of the 'wee beasties' universally known as tribbles, the air had immediately crackled with electrical animosity between the two groups. Korax had produced the Klingon equivalent of a disdainful sneer as he caught sight of the Enterprise men.

"Well, well, Earthlings, still racketting around the Federation in your garbage heap, are you? It must be some form of punishment devised by your devious Captain, to keep you shackled to such a monstrosity. No self-respecting Klingon would put up with such a mewling creature or such a hideous spacecraft."

Scott's hand slammed down on the table to prevent the impetuous Russian from leaping to his feet.

"Well, now, it if isna' Korax the Tribble Collector," he remarked conversationally to Chekov. "D'y'e think he enjoyed his wee present a while ago?"

"I am sure he was very happy to have such a generous collection of animals donated to him," the Russian replied seriously, leaning back in his chair and taking his cue from his superior.

Korax had gone a very funny colour at that reminder - even allowing for the fact that Klingon skin tone was very different from that of Humans - and loud murmurs of angry disgust had come from his companions. Korax had then stated very clearly the final, terrible, unforgivable insult to the Scot's beloved engines and both Scott and Chekov had pounced on their tormentors with fists flying, their fury taking the Klingons by surprise.

There had then followed a riotous, no-holds-barred fight between the two groups, only interrupted by a piercing whistle, indicating the imminent arrival of the police force. Klingons and Humans had scattered in all directions, falling over each other in their haste to escape! They were equally aware of the penalties for being caught in an affray, and no doubt the Klingons had similar orders about fighting - hard as they were for them to obey! However, they wanted to ingratiate themselves with the natives because Sigma Ari III was strategically quite valuable to both sides.

Thus it was that Scott and Chekov found themselves playing hide and seek with the native police force and possibly the Klingons too, bent on revenge.

"Sair, do the police know who ve are?" asked Chekov apprehensively.

"I canna say f'r sure, but I think so, laddie. We were gone before they came really close - but they'll know we weren't natives and they'll more than likely guess we are Federation - and the Enterprise is the only Starship in orbit. Aye, and they'll have seen the Klingons for sure; you couldna' mistake them!" Scott finished gleefully.

"What are ve to do, sair? Should ve return to the ship?"

"Ye canna be serious, laddie! Like this!?" And the Scot executed a full turn in front of his friend - bruised from fighting and filthy from rolling around on the tavern floor, he was a sorry sight. "Captain Kirk would hae us in the brig in double quick time," he continued.

"Best we find a low-price hostel and clean ourselves up."

"Yes, I see what you mean," replied Chekov solemnly.

Checking carefully to see if the coast was clear, they emerged from their hiding place and made their way unsteadily towards the suburbs of the city. Walking down a seemingly deserted road, they saw a group of battered Klingons slinking along in the distance and abruptly dived down an alleyway.

"Near one, that," commented Scott.

"What will Keptin Kirk do when the Klingons accuse us of starting a fight?" gasped Chekov, a little breathlessly as his midriff connected with a gatepost.

"Na', they'll no' report it, there are too many witnesses as to how a couple o' Humans beat them into a pulp!"

"I hope you're right," muttered Chekov gloomily. "Keptin Kirk would have a fit if he knew that we had once more allowed ourselves to be drawn into a brawl in a bar like some riff-raff off a space pirate's vessel. He was none too pleased the last time it happened!"

Scott started to laugh helplessly. "Did ye see Korax's face when we mentioned those wee beasties he's so fond of?" he gasped. "I thought he was goin' to ha'e a seizure. I never knew Klingons could go that colour," he finished thoughtfully. "Ye know, laddie, an angry Klingon is not only an ugly beastie, he's a smelly one too. Phew! I wouldna want to spend any length of time in a ship full o' Klingons, if they're all as mean as Korax an' the rest o' the bunch he was with. From what I've heard, Klingons dinna even like each other much, never mind us Humans!"

Scott fell silent, reflecting that it would be a sorry life without friends, ruled by fear and the agoniser. He abruptly chided himself for being maudlin in his drink. But he was nonetheless grateful for Pavel Chekov's friendship and company.

The sun set, and dusk fell in its usual spectacular manner as they reached a cheap but respectable hostel. The owner cast a dubious eye over their dishevelled state, but Federation credits were good currency and he was a hard working man trying to make a living. Anyway, he warmed to the friendly chat of the two Enterprise men, who appeared not to notice the threadbare state of the furnishings and complimented him on the view from his upper storey.

Both men were thankful to find plenty of hot water available for a shower and a primitive but efficient contraption for cleaning clothes quickly. Half an hour later, feeling more themselves and relatively clean, they ate a truly excellent meal served by the owner's pretty daughter. They sat at a table near to a roaring fire, snug against the evening chill and reminisced about the fight. Later, the talk turned to past leaves and past adventures. The older Scot had many tales to tell his young companion - each one taller than the last! Chekov listened gravely and in his turn told tales of Mother Russia and wild, improbable exploits by heroic young Russians in that country's distant past. Early in the morning they retired, weary but very pleased with themselves.

The waking up was hard.

More alcohol with the meal warred with the spirits already consumed, and Chekov vowed never again as he gingerly eased his way upright. He wondered whether Korax's head hurt as much as his did. He chuckled to himself as the memory of smashing a chair to smithereens over Korax's head returned to him. That must have given the Klingon a headache! Scott's words about his mother suddenly echoed in his mind... she would be ashamed of her gentle son revelling in the memory of hurting another - even a Klingon - and he felt abruptly guilty about the fight and being drunk. His grandmother had believed alcohol to be the liquid of the devil. It had certainly not done his great-uncle any good. Chekov dismissed these uncomfortable musings and went in search of Scott. He found him seated at the breakfast table, staring glassy-eyed at a cup of the local equivalent of coffee. Scott greeted his friend's arrival with a grunt and continued his morose inspection of his halaft. A steaming cup swiftly appeared before Chekov and he sniffed the slightly sweet aroma apprehensively. He was none too sure that he wanted any breakfast. When huge plates of what looked like some

form of seaweed arrived, he was quite sure!

Scott looked at the plates in horror. The previous evening's meal had not prepared him for native food - no way! Out of courtesy to their host, the two men made a pretence of eating. Actually, Scott found it was no worse than meals he'd had on previous planets. Even the less-experienced Chekov was surprised at the crispness of the texture. Once he forgot the fact that it was bright blue with mauve streaks, it was not too bad at all. They would not, however, recommend it as an addition to the Enterprise food processors. (Many people had added various native dishes in the past, with somewhat mixed results - both in the quality of the food and in the reaction of their fellow crewmen. There was, for instance, that so-called delicacy from Grixor which had brought Jim Kirk out in boils! Dr. McCoy had had a field day, doing test after test, before he discovered it was the phanat soup. Spock had lectured the irate Captain about 'the inadvisability of consuming an inordinate amount of a previously untried food substance', and the Bridge crew had had difficulty in keeping a straight face as their intrepid Captain tried to find a way of sitting comfortably in the command chair without worsening 'his... sensitive predicament', to quote Uhura. She of course was not mocking Jim Kirk, she would never do that, but she had seen the funny side of the outbreak. Whether Captain Kirk ever would was a matter for conjecture!)

A sudden crash from the kitchen jolted both officers out of their musings and brought them to their feet. Loud angry voices could be heard. One of them was chillingly familiar.

"Korax!" they exclaimed together.

"How in Hades did he find himself here, of all places?" groaned Scott, and followed Chekov as he raced to the kitchen, where sounds of breaking crockery continued amid wailing from the frightened cook.

The scene was one of devastation. Very little remained to be broken. A bruised and bedraggled Korax was holding a wicked-looking knife to a terrified native's throat. From his appearance it looked as though he had slept in a gutter or a ditch, and he was obviously demanding food - free of charge, of course. The owner was beside himself with fury and was threatening the angry Klingon with dire calamities if he didn't leave at once.

Scott took in the situation at a glance. Years of training and experience enabled him to quieten the owner with a simple request for silence, spoken in a tone of command. This earned him a look of grudging respect which mingled with the acute dislike on Korax's face.

"You again, Earthling? At least you have silenced the caterwauling of this scum. Now, I want hot food at once, or I slit the throat of this wretch!"

Scott turned to Chekov and winked swiftly before going to the stove and heaping an unbroken plate with steaming food. Korax threw the cook across the room and heaved a chair upright. He sat down as Scott put the food before him. He took a huge bite and spat it out hastily as it burned his mouth. He glared at the plate and did a violent double take as his gaze took in the brightly-hued blue and mauve 'seaweed'.

"Federation scum!" he yelled. "Are you trying to poison me?"

What is this filth?"

"It's a local dish, laddie, and it's nae poisonous as far as I know," replied Scott.

Pavel Chekov smothered a grin at the expression of innocence on Scott's face as he faced the alarmed Klingon. He filed away the Engineer's actions for more detailed study later, just as his mentor Mr Spock would have done.

"It is really werry nice to eat," he offered helpfully.

"Pah!" snarled Korax. "What else is there? Speak, worm!" he demanded of the owner.

"There is nothing else. Today is market day, as I have told you, and you must pay if you wish to eat," came the firm reply.

"Pay!" roared the Klingon. "For this?" and he threw the plate of food across the room to smash against the opposite wall. He glared at the owner, who glared back. He had had many years of dealings with aliens and no Klingon was going to intimidate him.

"You must of course pay for the breakages and general damage done to my premises," the native continued.

Korax started snarling in Klingonese. Scott decided that now was the time to intervene.

"Calm down, laddie," he told the enraged Klingon, who gawped at him in amazement. "I'll pay for the damage." He turned to the owner. "Our friend here doesna look as if he has a credit on him, and I wouldna wish ye to be in difficulties because o' what has happened."

Korax's face slowly suffused with a deeper colour as the hostel owner gratefully accepted Scott's credits. He seemed suddenly unsure of what to do. Scott, who knew something of Klingon custom, knew that Korax was now in his debt, for his honour as well as the money. He waited to see what the Klingon would do.

The native scuttled off, whistling happily to himself. Human and Klingon stared at each other for a long moment. The air was electric with tension. Then came an easing of the atmosphere; Chekov sighed silently with relief, not daring to make a sound. Korax put down the knife he was still holding and spread his hands wide, palms up to show he was unarmed.

"Human, you have paid my debt. By Klingon custom my honour is..." he struggled with the unpalatable words... "beholden to you until I can repay it. I make one request however, that you do not mention this custom of ours to anyone, particularly your Captain. It is not something we speak of to outsiders."

"Ye hae ma word, Mr. Korax."

"And mine," promised Chekov.

Korax fixed them both with a disdainful look and stalked out of the hostel; he swaggered haughtily down the road without a backwards glance.

"I vonder how he will repay it," said Chekov.

"Och, he'll find a way - and pretty quickly too, I'll be bound," chuckled Scott.

As they helped tidy up the mess, various bruises from the previous day made themselves felt, and that reminded them of the 'no fighting' orders they had transgressed. As the morning slowly progressed, they waited anxiously for any response by the Sigma Ari III authorities to the fight. And even more anxiously for any contact from Captain Kirk...

Just as they were beginning to relax, Scott's communicator beeped.

"Er... Scott here."

"Mr Scott, is Ensign Chekov with you?" came the quiet query.

Scott swallowed nervously and glanced at a pale-faced Pavel Chekov. They had both heard that tone before!

"Er... aye, sir, he is."

"Right. Both of you to the Governor's office at once - I think you know why, am I correct?"

"Aye, sir," both men answered together. Hastily they made their way to the imposing office of the planetary Governor, situated in the city centre.

They stood sweating before an indignant Governor and a furious Captain. They gave a full account of events before, during and after the fight, including the insults and various unprintable comments from Korax's companions. Scott also detailed the following fracas at the hostel, but true to his word, he made no mention of the Klingon custom he had invoked because he paid for the damage.

Kirk listened intently, fuming quietly.

"You are supposed to be two of Starfleet's finest, capable of obeying an order even under severe provocation!" he snapped. "However, the Klingons have not made any allegations or complaints, unusually for them. Indeed, Koloth insists it was all a complete misunderstanding. I am at a loss to understand his reaction, but it is fortunate for you. However, the Governor may wish to press civil charges against you, as well as the ones I may choose to implement." He turned to the white-haired man, who shook his head.

"Given the antagonism between Humans and Klingons, and the degree of provocation, a fight was inevitable. I am told you acquitted yourselves well. But - I want no more trouble. Is that clear, gentlemen?"

Scott and Chekov nodded with momentary relief - they still had to face their Commanding Officer. The said person was regarding them with a gleam in his eyes.

"Mr. Scott, I fear you have been leading young Mr. Chekov astray, teaching him bad habits. This must cease forthwith. But I believe I am right in saying that you still have five more days of shore leave left?"

They stared at him, dumbfounded.

"Without pay," added Kirk sternly, "and you will submit a full and detailed report to Mr. Spock on your return to the Enterprise. That is all, gentlemen. Dismissed!"

Jim Kirk watched them go, thoughtfully. He had a feeling that there was more to the story than an old-fashioned 'punch-up'. Perhaps he would find out why Koloth had acted so uncharacteristically when he read the reports submitted to Mr. Spock. Klingon honour was a morass of custom, not all understood by the Federation, and Scott had paid Korax's debt...

"Yes!" he murmured. "Now I understand!"

The Governor looked perplexed, but the Captain of the Enterprise simply smiled at him.

Scott and Chekov found themselves outside the Governor's office, still a bit dazed.

"Well, laddie, let's hae a wee dram," said Scott cheerfully. "Somewhere where there's no Klingons!" he added hastily, and Chekov laughed as they made their way out into the colourful streets and the warm sunshine of Sigma Ari III.

Later, on board the Enterprise, just before they left orbit, Scott received a sealed package. It contained a sum of credits and an unsigned note which simply said, "The debt is repaid."

The Scotsman smiled quietly and put it away safely.



# BEST OF BOTH

by

S L Ayres

(aided and abetted by J. Hales)

*"Why do you fight so hard to be part of only one world? Why not try instead to be the best of both?"*

The words echoed inside his mind. Seated at the familiar Science Station he focused his thoughts solely on the task in hand. He straightened, considering the information the console presented to him, then, unexpectedly, he caught sight of his reflection in one of the monitors.

Those words resounded deep inside him. He tried to block them out, to choose not to perceive them or their meaning. The years had enabled him to deny virtually anything, to close his mind to that which he found unacceptable. Almost. For those words returned, and for a moment they seemed nearly logical.

Logic.

Was it logical to laugh and cry, love and hate, rejoice and mourn? These emotions achieved nothing, blurred one's judgement, wasted time and energy that could be used to a greater purpose. One could not make objective decisions if one's view was distorted by futile emotions. He failed to see how emotional behaviour would benefit any conceivable situation. Emotions - love, friendship, caring - were not logical. He denied them, he would not allow evidence that they existed within him.

And yet...

*"Why not try instead to be the best of both?"*

The phrase re-echoed in his mind. Why did these words refuse his denial? Why, when he wished not to consider them, did they force their way to the forefront of his mind?

For an instant, a thought flickered through his consciousness. *Perhaps there are some things that cannot ever be denied.*

He became aware of a presence at his shoulder.

"Spock, are you all right?"

He turned to face the speaker. He hesitated for only a moment before he replied.

"Yes, Jim. I am all right."





# THE FORCED AFFAIR

by

Joyce Devlin

The USS Enterprise was en route for the planet Gilcorue, as per Admiralty orders, her mission diplomatic - the type her young Captain detested. Captain James T. Kirk was indeed anything but pleased; that was all too evident in the way he fiddled with his coffee cup.

"Why does Starfleet always pick on the Enterprise for these types of missions?" he grumbled to his Chief Medical Officer, who sat opposite him at a table in the empty Rec Room.

"I guess it's because Gilcorue has asked to join the Federation, and because of that they decided that under the circumstances an experienced ship's captain would benefit them more than an inexperienced one - and the Enterprise's record in these matters speaks for itself."

McCoy told him exactly what he already knew, but Kirk was still not convinced that that was the right answer to his question.

"How the hell do they expect anyone else to gain experience when they keep sending the Enterprise? I sometimes wonder if we keep breaking some rule that none of us knows anything about, and this is by way of a reprimand."

"Jim! Stop moaning, and drink your coffee before it gets cold," McCoy ordered as he finished his cup. "Who's going with you?" he asked as an afterthought.

"Starfleet has suggested in a roundabout way that they want you, Spock and Commander Kirsty Ross, the obstetrician we're taking to Sentinel. And before you ask, Bones, I don't know why." Kirk sipped at his coffee. After one mouthful he pulled a face. "Ugh, it's cold!"

"Thought it would be by now." McCoy could not help but smile. "Want another cup?"

"No thanks."

"According to the reports I've read on the first survey, it would seem that Gilcorue is almost a thousand years more advanced than us in the medical field," McCoy informed him.

"Then why do they need an obstetrician?" Kirk changed his mind, rose and crossed to the coffee machine in the corner.

"How would I know? I'm only the C.M.O. around here." McCoy watched as Kirk helped himself to steaming hot coffee.

"An obstetrician... that's someone who specialises in the problems of pregnancy and labour, right?" Kirk asked as he sipped the piping-hot liquid.

"That's right. And I'll tell you something - she's a damn good doctor as well," McCoy informed him. "Sorry, Jim, but my lunch hour's up."

"So is mine," Kirk responded as he stuffed his cup down the disposal chute. "You know, maybe Starfleet's holding something back, like a special request for a female doctor."

The Enterprise hung gracefully in orbit around Gilcorue. Having received transporter co-ordinates from the High Council, the Enterprise officers were ready to beam down to the planet's surface - all, that was, except McCoy, who as usual was grumbling about having his atoms scrambled. The last of his complaint was lost as the transporter beam took hold and carried them down to the planet.

They materialised in a small reception room in front of two men who were, Kirk presumed, Shamoia and Shamatia, who had said they would be there to greet them. Kirk stepped forward.

"Captain Kirk, I presume." The taller of the two came forward, his hand outstretched in friendship. Kirk took it.

"I am Shamoia, High Priest of Gilcorue. Welcome to our humble city of Gilcor."

Kirk smiled. "Our pleasure, sir. This is my First Officer, Mr. Spock," Kirk introduced the tall Vulcan.

"A Vulcan!" Shamoia exclaimed. The older man had great difficulty in hiding his excitement.

At that point the second Gilcoruan stepped forward. "I am Shamatia," he introduced himself. "Welcome to our city. And these must be the two doctors Starfleet said would be accompanying you."

"Yes - this is my Chief Medical Officer, Dr. McCoy, and Commander Ross, Head of Obstetrics at Base Hospital, Sentanel," Kirk introduced the remainder of his party.

"Welcome, Doctors," Shamoia responded. "Please follow us to the High Council Chambers." He turned to the door, and Shamatia followed the elder Gilcoruan out.

The diplomatic party was led through the building into a large airy room containing a large table behind which Kirk counted twelve seats. The High Priest beckoned them to sit in the four chairs that had been placed in front of the table. As they obeyed the side door opened and nine men dressed in similar robes to those of the two Priests, but in a myriad of different colours, entered and took their places behind the table. One seat, however, remained empty.

"Where is Samaia?" Shamoia asked the Priest on his right.

"He asks forgiveness, Shamoia. He has been detained - a bereavement in his family," he was informed.

"Very well. Captain, these are the members of our High Council, known as the Council of Twelve. We represent twelve different areas of our planet, and all views on joining the Federation must be heard before we can make any final decision," the High Priest explained.

"As you wish, sir. You must, of course, abide by your own customs. We have not come to change anything, only to put forward the views and policies of the Federation, as you asked," Kirk replied sincerely, hoping that things would go smoothly for once.

After an hour it became evident that things were not going according to plan. Samaia still had not joined the High Council, and it was becoming clear that Shamoia was displeased at the delay, for he and the others had decided to join the Federation, but could do nothing without Samaia's vote - and if he were to vote against them, then his reasons must be fully investigated.

"You must forgive the delay, Captain," Shamoia apologised. "I will take these papers to Samaia's home, if I may." The old man stood up, lifting the papers to replace them in the folder they had come from.

"Do not bother to move, Shamoia," a voice from the door said. All turned to see who the intruder was. Shamoia dropped the papers as if they were white hot.

"Samaia, I demand to know the meaning of this intrusion!"

Shamoia's demand was virtually drowned out as the room filled with armed guards. No-one dared move.

"If you value your lives, do not move. Captain?"

Kirk stood up and faced the intruder. "I am Captain Kirk," he informed him.

"There are a few tests that I would like you and your fellow officers to take part in before I sign the document," the youngest member of the High Council informed the Enterprise officers.

"Samaia, I forbid it!" Shamoia yelled.

"You, old man, are in no position to forbid anything. Take them out," Samaia commanded the leader of the guards.

The Enterprise officers were escorted out into the corridor, down a flight of stairs and into a security area. Once inside they were led down another corridor. Suddenly Samaia stopped and turned. The guard opened the door that he indicated.

"All right, put the Vulcan and the Chief Medical Officer in there," he ordered.

The guard obeyed. Spock and McCoy were pushed into a room no bigger than a cell, and the door was closed behind them.

"Why are you treating us like common criminals?" Kirk demanded.

"We are not. Your friends will be quite comfortable, Captain, and safe... unless you and the Commander do not do as we ask." Samaia walked on.

The room into which Spock and McCoy had been pushed contained two bunk beds along one wall; a pillow and blankets lay at the foot

of each bed.

McCoy looked around him. "Looks like it's going to be a long stay," he mused.

"In that case, Doctor, I suggest you make yourself comfortable." Spock surveyed the sleeping arrangements. "Would you like the top or the bottom?" he asked.

"Bottom, if you don't mind, Spock," McCoy replied as he had a good look at the beds. "Wonder where they're taking Jim and Kirsty?"

"I do not know," Spock responded as he climbed with ease onto the top bunk.

"Isn't there a way out of here?" McCoy asked.

Captain James T. Kirk and Commander Kirsty Ross were led further along the corridor into a large luxurious room, the main feature of which was an enormous circular double bed set in the centre of the room. On one wall was an open log fire, its warmth taking the chill off the room; the opposite wall, from floor to ceiling, was in mirror glass.

"Please make yourselves at home," Samaia instructed. "Commander, you will find something a little more comfortable to wear in the wardrobe. The bathroom is through that door on the left." With that he turned and left.

Kirk tried the door after he was gone, but of course it was locked from the outside.

"What do they want from us, sir?" Ross asked. Although Kirk was not her commanding officer she still respected his rank.

"I don't know, Commander," Kirk replied.

"Captain, please relax." The voice filled the room.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" Kirk questioned, hoping that they could talk.

"All we want is for you to relax in the company of a beautiful woman," the voice informed him.

Kirk turned towards the female in the room with him. He was confused.

"Captain, is it not true that every man appreciates a beautiful woman?" the voice continued.

"Some men don't," Kirk said flatly.

"But Captain, you are not one of those men."

"How do you know?" Kirk questioned.

"Captain, we are not stupid," the voice informed him.

"Why put us together?" Kirk asked Ross in a low voice.

"I don't know, but from what it is saying, perhaps it's trying to match-make us," she suggested, wishing afterwards she had not.

"Quite right, Commander." The voice filled the room once again.

"What have you done with my officers?" Kirk demanded.

"Your concern is most gratifying, Captain. However, your friends will remain safe... if you do as we ask."

"If you do not tell us what you want from us, how can we do what you want?" Kirk asked.

"Make love to the woman." The statement was flat, unemotional.

Ross gasped. She could not believe what she had just heard. Furthermore, she was sure that Kirk would not give in to the demand.

Kirk stared. "No. That I will not do," he informed the voice without hesitation.

Ross let out the breath she did not realise she was holding.

The voice was not put off, for it had not as yet played its trump card. "Then, Captain, watch the mirror... and witness what we are about to begin."

The mirror glass swirled, drawing both Kirk and Ross to it. They could not turn their eyes away; it held them captive. Suddenly it glowed red and cast up the image of Spock and McCoy lying naked on tables. A Gilcoruan attached what looked like electrodes to various parts of their bodies. Kirk stared, horrified. He was rooted to the spot as if he was hypnotised.

The image Kirk was watching was also being witnessed by Spock and McCoy, who were sitting in their own cell, unharmed. The wall in front of them was acting like a two-way monitor. They could see exactly what Kirk saw, and at the same time they saw and heard his reaction.

"How can you just sit there, Spock?" McCoy yelled.

"Doctor, there is nothing we can do but sit and observe, so please conserve your energy," Spock replied. If only McCoy had been able to mind-read, he would have seen that Spock was in fact deeply concerned for his friend.

"We can't just sit here!" McCoy continued.

"Doctor, neither you nor Mr. Spock can do anything to help your Captain." The voice filled the room that Spock and McCoy occupied.

"Who are you? What do you want?" McCoy demanded to know.

"We are desperate people. Watch, and learn."

Three hours later Ross could stand to watch no longer. McCoy's body lay still. The look on his face haunted her mind. Kirk sat on

the edge of the bed, his head in his hands, trying to block out the image that filled the wall.

"How can you just sit there and watch when you could so easily put a stop to this?" Ross yelled, unable to control her feelings any longer. Her whole body shook.

"She is correct, Captain." The voice filled the room once again.

"What do you want from us?" Ross asked, hoping that this time the demands would be different.

"All we are asking is that you make love to each other."

"No. We don't love each other." Kirk's response was spontaneous and desperate. He was a man of many principles, and making love on command was not one of them.

"Captain." Ross spoke sharply to him. Kirk looked up at her. Once she had his attention she continued in a softer voice, "Jim." She touched his shoulder with her right hand. "Spock's life and McCoy's are worth much more than what they are asking."

"No. I cannot do what they ask." Kirk bowed his head. It was not that he could not do it if he wanted to, for she was very appealing, it was just that he would not degrade her so.

Each understood how the other felt at that moment. The Gilcoruan' were holding a gun to their heads in the form of Spock's and McCoy's agony.

Spock's whole body convulsed under the torture. Kirk could stand it no longer.

"Stop it before you kill him!"

"Only if you do as we ask." The voice was as unemotional as ever.

"Captain... Jim..."

Kirk moved away from her; she did not understand.

"You don't understand. I just can't!" Kirk sounded dejected.

Spock's torture continued until Ross could no longer stand to watch. "I never had you figured as a homosexual!" she suddenly yelled at him."

Kirk swung round to face her as the full impact of her statement hit him. "I'm not," he said flatly in self defence.

It was clear to her that her statement had hit him below the belt, as she had intended. She hoped it had brought him out from within himself.

"If you are not," she continued in the same vein, "then I don't understand why you can't do as they ask. Even... if it is only to stop this."

By the time she had finished speaking she was shaking with apprehension. Had she gone too far? she wondered. Kirk stepped

forward, his hazel eyes acknowledging her words, but daring her to say more.

"I thought Spock was your friend."

"That's enough!" Kirk ordered. Her tactics were working - she was starting to get under his skin.

"Why? Spock would risk his life to save yours, yet you won't even lift a finger to save his. You don't deserve the loyalty of the Vulcan. Some friend you've turned out to be!" She took a step backwards as he stepped forward. "It's not as if they want some top-secret information..."

Kirk gripped her by the shoulders. She was shocked to find that she was trembling under his grip. "Stop it!" he ordered.

"Why? Can't you take the truth?" she cried as the tears fell down her face.

The one thing that always seemed to get to him was a woman crying. He took her into his arms to comfort her. She let her head rest on his chest, knowing that if she was to change his mind she would have to be very careful. Spock and McCoy depended on her next move. She let the tears fall.

Kirk smoothed her hair. The tremors continued as he touched her neck. She looked up at him, and he wiped the tears from her cheeks. His gentleness touched her deeply as he kissed her on the forehead. It was warm and tender, totally unexpected. His eyes met hers, and she saw a desperately shy man. The next move was hers.

She reached up and kissed him tenderly on the lips, summoning up all the warmth she could. His response was slow, yet he was drawn as the kiss became one of passion. They clung together for a few long moments. Finally released from the embrace, she looked up into the sad hazel eyes. She knew how much this was costing him, and a slow growing ache came over her.

At that moment Kirk's mouth found hers, his mind made up. This time their kiss was hungry. Tongue sought tongue as they clung together with a fierceness that frightened her, but she could not back out now, not after coming this far and saying what she had.

They sank onto the bed, and he held her by the waist as they lay embracing. For a long time they searched each other's eyes, saying nothing, then Kirk rolled onto his back. Both knew what they had to do. He pulled her on top of him. Both were impatient, wanting to get it over and done with. As she lay on top of him he undid her uniform with an easy grace while she fumbled with the fastening of his.

The Captain of the Enterprise slowly became aware that his body was in fact reacting to hers.

However, she seemed apprehensive, almost unsure of what he expected her to do. This confused him, as she had been so eager for him to do as they were ordered. His eyes quizzed hers. She smiled and drew him down to her. Suddenly she tensed beneath him, and cried out in pain.

"Oh shit!" he said as he rolled away from her. "I'm sorry - I can't."

"Jim, what's wrong?" She was confused. Had she done something wrong?

"You're a virgin. I have no right to take that away from you," he responded, turning his back on her.

"Jim, would it make such a difference if I wasn't?" she questioned. However, she did not wait for his reply. "I've waited for quite some time to find the right man to offer myself to. For me, the right man must be someone worthy of my friendship. Jim, you are that man." She propped herself up on one elbow and placed her hand on his shoulder. "I'd give my life to have the friendship that you and Spock share, and if giving up my virginity will save the three men I respect most in this universe, then I am willing to pay the price."

Kirk turned to face her. She reached over and kissed him tenderly.

"Are you sure?" he asked. "If you say no, then I won't touch you," he informed her.

"Jim, do you honestly think I would be lying here if I was not sure that this is what I want?" She smiled, adding, "However, it would be nicer if the affair had not been forced upon us."

Once again they kissed. Their joining was one of tenderness and care.

Breathless, he held her close for many minutes before they parted slowly. When Kirsty sat up she was shockingly pale as the realisation of what had happened hit her hard.

"Are you all right?" he asked.

"I'm not sure. Where's the toilet?" she asked as she rose unsteadily from the bed.

"Through that door." Kirk pointed as he too sat up.

She crossed the short distance to the door, shivering with emotion, and closed it behind her. The sound of retching was unmistakable. She stayed in the bathroom for a long time.

Kirk thought of going to her, but instead he granted her her privacy. He wrestled with his thoughts as he got off the bed and crossed to the wardrobe, where he found two robes. Taking them from their hangars he shouldered into the larger of the two, and crossed to the smouldering fire, where he placed a log on the embers. He turned as the bathroom door clicked open and Kirsty stepped out, wrapped in a bath towel.

"Are you all right?" Kirk asked, concerned, as he handed her the robe.

She smiled as she took it from him. "Just a little unsteady. Tension," she added, rubbing the back of her neck with her free hand.

"You'd better put the robe on - it'll cover you better," he told her, a little embarrassed.

She obeyed, discarding the towel after she had slipped the robe on. Her colour had returned.

"I could do with a drink," she told him as she sat down by the fire.

As soon as she said that there was a beam of light and two glasses appeared on the floor beside them, along with a bottle of orange liquid.

McCoy, his head in his hands, could not believe what his Captain had been forced into doing. He had always known that Jim Kirk would do anything for Spock, but never before had he been forced into an affair. For that reason McCoy felt sure Kirk would have difficulty in handling the situation, for the image he had witnessed was horrifying. Never before had McCoy experienced out-of-the-body torture only by watching an illusion of himself. He could understand Kirk's reaction to the illusion.

Kirsty Ross tried to relax against Kirk's shoulder. She wasn't surprised that she felt nothing - her whole body was numb. Reaction. Kirk had not said more than a few words to her in the past hour. Both were deep in their own thoughts.

Suddenly they were brought back to reality with a bang. The image of Spock on the wall dissolved and was replaced by total blankness.

Startled by the change, Kirk jumped up. "What's going on? What have you done with him?" he demanded to know.

"Captain, please relax. We have done nothing to your First Officer," the voice informed him. "Observe."

The mirror glass swirled and cast up an image of Spock and McCoy lying asleep on the bunk beds.

The Enterprise Captain lurched at the viewer. There was a blue flash, and Kirk was thrown across the room against the bed. Ross stared. The Captain was unconscious.

"What have you done to him?" she screamed as she knelt down beside him, checking for a pulse.

"Nothing. He is merely stunned," the voice said. "When the viewer is on it acts as a force field."

"Why are you doing this to us?"

"We need to learn."

"Learn what?"

"What you can teach us about love."

Ross lifted the unconscious Captain's head and laid it in her lap before she replied. "Well, to start with, you don't force people to love. Love... well, it is a special feeling two people have for each other, not only between a man and a woman but between

two people of the same sex," she explained. "The Captain has a special love for the two you hold captive, but he does not love me."

"But he made love to you."

"We had sex together, because you forced him into it," she tried to explain, but it was as if she was trying to tell a child.

"Do you not love him?" the voice persisted.

"No."

She was left wondering what their captors would do to them next. Her attention was drawn to the still figure that stirred in her lap. "Jim, are you all right?"

"Yes, darling, I'm fine. Must have fallen asleep."

It dawned on her that they must have implanted the thought in his mind that he loved her. Kirk pulled her to him. This time she was powerless to stop him.

When Kirk woke later he was fully aware of what had passed between them. The female beside him was still asleep. He did not wake her as he slipped out of the bed and dressed, then sat down by the fire. What he would say to her when she awoke, he did not know.

Ross stirred. She knew instantly that Kirk was not beside her, and this did not surprise her at all. Gathering up the sheet she slipped from the bed.

"Jim..." She looked at the dejected figure by the fire.

Kirk lifted his head in her direction, responding to his name. "I'm sorry. Forgive me."

She picked up her uniform from the floor. "Don't be. You did what you had to." She smiled, and her smile was one of understanding before she turned and went into the bathroom to save them any further embarrassment.

When she re-entered the room the viewer flicked on and Spock and McCoy could be seen clearly. Both looked perfectly fit.

"Spock. Bones," Kirk said. He did not think they could hear him.

"Jim! Are you all right?" McCoy asked.

"Yes. Queen to queen's level six." He was not about to be caught out a second time.

"King to queen's level two," Spock replied.

The exchange was all he needed to feel almost one hundred percent sure that it was Spock, yet there was a nagging feeling of unreality inside his mind.

"For Pete's sake, Jim, are you all right?" McCoy asked once again, in his usual manner.

"Just shaken, Bones," Kirk replied, rubbing his neck.

"Like hell! You're shaking!"

"Yes, well, my head does hurt a bit," Jim Kirk relented; it was useless to try and hide anything from the trained eyes of McCoy.

"Thought as much. What about you, Dr. Ross?"

"Shaken, but fine. I'll live. But I would like to get the Captain to Sickbay to check him over. That was a bad smack on the head he got, and he was not his usual self when he came round," she informed them, taking a step forward until she stood next to Kirk.

"As you see, Captain, your friends are unhurt," the voice came again.

"I demand an explanation." Kirk spoke firmly as he paced the floor to the door.

"All in due course, Captain. But first, tell me why it is that the female has not conceived?"

Kirk swung round to look at her. The one thing he had not considered was the possibility of her becoming pregnant.

"That's quite simple," Ross said, looking at the Captain. It was clear that she could not go into full detail, but only give a brief explanation. "Conception does not automatically follow..." she began, but was interrupted by the voice.

"Perhaps it would be better if Dr. McCoy were to explain."

"Well you see, ovulation is different in every female..."

"What is ovulation?" the voice asked innocently.

"Dr. McCoy is not as conversant with this subject as I am, if you have any questions to be answered," Ross piped up, to McCoy's visible relief.

"Very well."

"A woman does not automatically become pregnant, as conception can take place up to 24 to 36 hours after intercourse - and as there are many different races in the universe the conception rate is different for each race."

Her explanation seemed to satisfy him for the moment. "What race are you?" he asked. "You appear to be Human, but the room sensors indicate you are not."

"No, I am not Human."

Kirk turned to stare at her; he had always assumed she was from Earth.

"Don't look at me like that, Captain," she said, keeping the conversation as formal as possible. "I am from the planet Andromeda. My family was among the first colonists from Earth to be accepted by the Andromedans themselves. As you are no doubt well aware, the differences between the Andromedans and Humans are very minor."

"When Andromeda entered the Federation a hundred years ago it was discovered that the native population was dying out," Spock enlightened them on the facts as he knew them.

"So the colonists and the Andromedans joined forces to save the race?" Kirk asked.

"Are you trying to tell us that the Andromedans as we know them are not the original race who joined the Federation?" McCoy asked.

"Yes, Doctor. Mr. Spock is right. You see the Andromedans were following a set breeding pattern. The only way to explain it is simply to compare it with a dog's pedigree. Selected males of good standard were used, together with females of the same quality, even if it meant breeding grandfather to granddaughter, uncle to niece - even father to daughter. This line breeding had been followed for many years when it was discovered that in certain lines no progeny were being born. That they could accept, but when the problem became widespread they started to worry as it soon became obvious that they were bred too finely to have offspring. Then one of the colonists was able to get one of the natives pregnant, with no problems. It went on from there until we became what we are today - a mixture of Human and Andromedan," Ross explained.

"I see. So you and your race were saved?"

"Yes."

"Tell me, are your people experiencing similar problems?" the Captain asked.

"You will find your doors open and Samaia waiting for you. He will escort you around the grounds and explain our actions to you."

There was the distinct sound of an automatic lock clicking off, and the doors slid open.

The Captain of the Enterprise had great difficulty in restraining himself from hitting the Gilcoruan who stood waiting for them as the voice had said. The only thing that stopped him was the sight of Spock. He stood by the man's side, and McCoy was also waiting there.

"You two all right?" Kirk questioned with a smile of relief that he was in fact seeing them in the flesh.

"Perfectly, Captain. It was merely an illusion that they displayed for you," Spock stated.

"Why, you..." Kirk's reaction was instantaneous. His fist clenched and he turned on the Gilcoruan, a blow imminent, but Spock stepped forward and caught the Captain's hand before the blow could land.

"Jim, don't."

Without a backward glance Samaia started to walk off down the corridor. The landing party followed. Spock walked with the Captain, and McCoy was a few paces behind with Ross.

"Kirsty." McCoy spoke quietly so that only she heard.

"Yes?"

"I want to see you professionally once we get back to the Enterprise."

Kirsty Ross stopped dead in her tracks as the full implications of McCoy's statement hit her. "You saw everything, didn't you?" she demanded.

"Yes." McCoy held her gaze. "I'm telling you because you're a doctor, and may be able to throw some light on this mystery."

"The only thing that bothers me at this moment is that if we don't get a move on we'll be left behind and perhaps never find out the answers."

The landing party were shown into a large changing room with lockers lining the walls. It was obvious to them all that this room led into some kind of sealed off area of the complex; one door was of clear perspex, leading to another room, and the other door was solid.

"Please remove all your clothes and hang them in the lockers," Samaia ordered.

"If it's all the same to you, I'll wait outside until you're finished," Ross said.

"Doctor, if you would care to go through the other door you will find a female assistant waiting for you," the High Priest informed her. She glanced at the Captain, who nodded.

Samaia led the officers into a decontamination shower which cleansed their bodies of all bacteria. Once released from its beam they were gowned in germ-free clothes and led into a small reception area inside the plastic bubble.

"Samaia, why all these precautions?" McCoy asked, unable to conceal his medical curiosity.

"That you will see for yourselves. Please follow me." The Gilcoruan moved off ahead of the Enterprise officers.

Kirk turned to help Ross as they reached an air lock. Her reaction was not what he had expected.

"Don't touch me... I'll manage fine, Captain."

Kirk felt hurt by her rejection of him - he did not understand it. Spock glanced at her as the airlock reopened.

"Mr. Spock." She spoke just loudly enough for him to hear.

"Yes, Dr. Ross?"

"You have to help Jim. They implanted a thought in his mind..."

"That he loves you?" Spock questioned.

"Yes."

"Doctor, the Captain is a very private man, and before I can do anything to help him, first he must want me to," Spock informed her as he followed the Captain through the airlock and into a nursery.

"These infants you see here will not live past their fifth birthday. There is no known reason," Samaia said quietly.

Kirk could not help but watch Ross examine the child closest to her.

"You say they die before they are five?" McCoy asked.

"Yes."

"Autopsy reports - what do they reveal?"

"Nothing."

"I see."

"Samaia, may I examine an expectant mother?" Ross asked, adding, "With your permission, Captain."

"I don't see why not if it's all right with Samaia." Kirk sounded distant as realisation set in. Why had they done what they had?

"After I show you the rest. Please follow me." Samaia led them through another decontamination area into what could only be described as a baby bank. The room contained row upon row of clear bubbles inside which were living, growing embryos at various stages of development.

Even McCoy felt the sickening reaction to the sight. "Is this how you grow your children?" he asked.

"Doctor, as you see we do not have female hosts for our children to grow in," the Gilcoruan replied as calmly as he could. It was obvious to them that he too was sickened.

All turned at the sudden screaming noise behind them as the room filled with medical personnel.

"What's going on?" Kirk asked.

"An abortion, Jim," McCoy observed as a plastic womb rejected an embryo which lay withering on a table that was obviously a rejection conveyor belt.

Ross grabbed hold of the table edge as dizziness crept over her. Although she was an obstetrician she was also a woman, and her feelings overcame her. Kirk went to her side and slipped his arms around her waist to stop her from falling.

"I've seen enough," he stated.

"This way." The Gilcoruan led the way out into the corridor and into an office.

Ross sat down, grateful for the seat that Kirk helped her to. McCoy busied himself with his medical scanner.

"She just fainted, Jim," he informed the Captain, who turned to

face Samaia. There were questions he wanted answers for, and in the mood he was now in Jim Kirk would not be happy until he had them all.

"I think you have some explaining to do," he opened, trying hard to hold on to his temper, which was almost at boiling point.

"Over six hundred years ago our doctors produced the first test tube baby, who proved to be a very good scholar. But with our thirst for medical advancements we were not satisfied with just that. We went on to discover that by controlling certain chemical changes at the onset of conception the children were quite brilliant. So we carried on with the experiment until... well, until it took over. But now all is not well - the abortion rate is high, and those children we bring to term do not survive. We attempted to return to the old ways, but... Captain, we did not know how to go about making love, or having children naturally. You see, there was no indication in any of our books or computers as to how you went about it." This answer was not what any of them had expected.

"Why could you not just ask for help instead of forcing the Captain and Dr. Ross as you did?" McCoy asked.

"We did not think they would agree." The Gilcoruan inclined his head.

"We would have helped, but not in that way," McCoy went on as it became clear that these people were desperate to survive, and would do anything to ensure it.

"Captain, perhaps it would be better if you returned to the ship and informed Starfleet of the situation," Spock suggested.

"Yes, of course. You're right."

"Jim, are you all right?" McCoy questioned, running his scanner over the Captain. As usual he hummed and hawed over the readout before he made any comment. "You'll do, but I want to check you over completely on the Enterprise - both of you."

"You were our last hope of saving our race," the Gilcoruan said.

"Captain, permission to remain planetside," Ross asked without looking at him.

"No, I'd prefer it if you were to beam aboard with the rest of us," Kirk replied firmly.

"Jim, the sooner we get started on the examinations, the better," McCoy jumped in.

Kirk could not argue with that fact. He could not understand his own attitude to the situation - normally he would not have reacted as he had done. This puzzled him, and his feelings were in total turmoil.

McCoy looked directly at him. He was worried - and it showed.

"All right, Bones. You're right. The sooner you get things checked out the easier it will be for the medical relief team from Sentanel."

"If you are calling in relief from Sentinel, then I think you'd be better to ask for Baxter's team," Ross suggested.

Kirk followed her suggestion and discovered that Baxter's team had been set up for medical emergencies. Starfleet was, in fact, glad of the opportunity to test the unit's effectiveness. As it was the Enterprise was ordered to assist in any way possible until the rapid-action unit arrived in five days time. This gave him some time to sort out his feelings towards Kirsty Ross. He was still unaware of the fact that the Gilcoruans had implanted the feelings in his mind.

Three days later Jim Kirk sat studying his orders for the third time in an hour when the intercom on his desk buzzed. He flicked a switch and the viewer came on to reveal Uhura's dark features.

"Yes, Uhura, what is it?" he asked.

"Sir, Dr. Ross on line one," she informed him.

"All right, patch her through." Kirk smiled - it would be good to hear her voice, even if he could not see her face.

"Patching her through now, sir."

"Captain?" Ross's soft voice came across loud and clear.

"Kirsty?"

"Captain, I thought you would need the preliminary medical examination results to brief the relief unit." She kept her reply formal - in fact to Kirk's ears it sounded as though ice was dripping from it.

"I see. Have you come across any problems?"

"No, not really," she informed him. "It would seem that the main problem is that they require a complete re-education programme in family planning."

Kirk's sixth sense told him that things were not all as they should be. For one thing, she sounded tired. Not at all sure how to put it to her he decided on a straightforward statement.

"You sound tired."

"Yes, I am, and so is McCoy," she replied.

"What's up?"

"That I don't know. You'd better ask McCoy - he's here now."

"Bones, what's the problem?" Kirk asked; however, the answer was not what he had expected.

"That's a puzzle. I honestly don't know." McCoy sounded worried as he continued his reply. "We're beaming up now, and before you say anything else I want to run some tests on you and Spock. McCoy out."

Kirk closed down the link with the planet and made his way to

the transporter room with his mind racing. It wasn't like the Chief Medical Officer to beam back on board for anything trivial, so whatever the problem Kirk knew it had to be serious - and that worried him. With his mind still on the call the turbolift ride to the transporter deck seemed to take ages, which did nothing to improve his state of mind.

Life on the Enterprise was never dull, was never exactly routine, and Jim Kirk enjoyed the company of a pretty woman who was not a member of his crew, but this time apart from welcoming her aboard the ship he had seen very little of her. Yet at this precise moment he felt like a schoolboy who had a crush on one of his teachers. He knew the whole thing stemmed from the visit to the planet, but why should he still be feeling this way? As the turbolift eventually came to a stop Kirk made a mental note to mention the feeling to McCoy, who he felt would understand better than his Vulcan First Officer.

The transporter was in operation, and as Kirk entered the room the beam released its occupants. As McCoy and Kirsty stepped down from the platform the woman crumpled to the floor. Kirk hit the intercom button on the wall and ordered an emergency medical team to be sent down immediately.

McCoy set to work with his field medical scanner humming softly in his hands. Kirk hovered in the background, trying not to get in the way, yet his whole attitude to the situation gave McCoy another worry to add to his collection. The doctor frowned at the scanner readings; they were not what he had expected at all.

"What's wrong, Bones?" Kirk asked, trying to keep the worried tone out of his voice.

"Looks like a bad kidney infection, Jim," McCoy informed him as the medical trolley came through the door.

"Kidney infection?" Kirk repeated as he helped to lift the still body onto the trolley.

"Quite common in the first few months when the hormones are as high."

"You mean...?" Kirk's face fell as it drained of all colour.

McCoy stopped in mid stride as he realised what he had just implied. "It's too early to tell, Jim, but her hormone level is high and that does tend to indicate that she is." With that he hurried after the medical team, leaving Kirk staring after him.

"Are you all right, sir?" Kyle, the transporter chief, asked.

"Yes," Kirk replied a little too sharply as he headed for the door. "Kyle..."

"Sir?"

"Close down the transporter."

"Aye aye, sir," Kyle responded.

Kirk was not at all surprised to find his Chief Medical Officer

busy reading what looked like a large case file. His desk was cluttered with medical books and computer tapes. It was clear that something was bothering him. Kirk stood silent for a few moments before he forced a cough to draw the doctor's attention from his research.

"Oh, it's you," McCoy said as he looked up.

Kirk received the impression that if it had been anyone else McCoy would not have been at all happy at the interruption.

"You'd better sit down before you fall down, Jim," McCoy observed.

Kirk obeyed. For some reason he felt terrible, and for once he did not argue with the doctor.

"How is she, Bones?" he asked.

"You want the truth?"

"Yes."

I honestly don't know."

"What do you mean, you don't know!" Kirk exploded.

"Just what I say, Jim. I don't know."

"Damn it, man, you're a healer aren't you?"

Kirk stood up too quickly and McCoy was on his feet in an instant as he had to grab hold of the doctor's desk to stop himself from collapsing.

"All right, sit down slowly," McCoy commanded.

Kirk did not object to the doctor's helping hand. "What happened?"

"You just about passed out, that's what happened," McCoy informed him.

"Sorry - I shouldn't have yelled at you like that. Since coming back from Gilcorue I've done nothing but snap at the crew for no apparent reason."

McCoy took a reading on his scanner. "Jim, you've got the same kind of kidney infection as Kirsty and I have."

"What do you mean?"

"It would seem that we ate or drank something that did not agree with our systems, and we can't put it out because our kidneys can't cope with it. That's to put it mildly," McCoy told him.

"But how come Kirsty's on your critical list?" Kirk asked.

"Well, like I said her hormone level is twice as high as it should be, which can cause all sorts of problems."

"So what do you suggest?"

"I'll give you an antibiotic shot and follow it up with some tablets; they helped me, so I hope it works again." McCoy lifted the hypo from the top of his desk, set it to the required drug and pressed it against Kirk's arm before he could object.

As he did so Chapel, the Head Nurse, put her head round the office door and informed them that Kirsty was coming round. Both men followed her into the isolation ward.

McCoy surveyed the diagnostic panel above the bed and frowned, not at all happy. "Has that indicator been as low as that for long, Nurse?"

"Yes, it dropped as you predicted it would just before you went into your office, Doctor," Chapel replied.

"All right." McCoy bent over the awakening figure. "How do you feel now?"

"Tired," Ross responded. Catching sight of the Captain she added, "You look terrible."

"I feel terrible," Kirk replied.

"All right, Kirsty, get some sleep." Turning his attention to Kirk, McCoy threatened, "And you, get off to your quarters and get to bed or I'll have you in Sickbay for forty-eight hours."

"All right, I get the message. I'm off."

Kirk entered Sickbay early the following morning and headed straight for McCoy's office. "How's Kirsty this morning?" he asked the doctor, who was sitting behind his desk eating breakfast.

McCoy frowned as Kirk whipped the last piece of bacon off his plate. "Didn't you have any breakfast yourself?" he asked.

"No, I came right down to see how Kirsty was."

"What's the big concern?" McCoy asked. "Until four days ago you had hardly said two words to her."

"I feel responsible for what happened."

"Because you did what you had to do?"

"Yes."

"Jim, there's no need to feel responsible." McCoy stood up and gathered his dirty dishes.

"What do you know about it?" Kirk snapped in self defence.

"Look, we were forced to watch that illusion they displayed to you, and at the same time we saw what they made you do," explained McCoy. "Plus I have had a long talk with Kirsty and she knows that if she had said no, you would not have touched her."

"She told you that?" Kirk mellowed slightly as McCoy carried on.

"Yes. So you see, there's no need to upset yourself."

"Captain Kirk to the Bridge. Captain Kirk to the Bridge." Uhura's voice came over the intercom.

Kirk flipped on the respond switch and said, "On my way. Kirk out." Then he looked at McCoy. "Keep me posted, Bones." With that he left the puzzled doctor in his office.

Kirk saw at a glance why he was wanted on the Bridge. The face of the Captain of the Starship Layfayette filled the main viewer. Kirk smiled a welcome. "You're early."

"I honestly thought you'd be glad of that, Jim, knowing how you hate sitting about doing nothing," the other captain responded.

"All right, you've made your point. What's your E.T.A.?" Kirk did not exactly snap, but Captain Martain frowned.

"Two hours, Jim."

Kirk saw the frown and gave a rueful smile. He shouldn't take out his frustration on an innocent... well, bystander. "Sorry, Bob. It's been a hell of a week, what with one thing and another."

"I know the feeling."

"Look, there are some details that you'll need to be briefed on, so as soon as you stabilise orbit you'd better beam across with the relief team."

"Very well. Layfayette out."

Exactly two hours later the Bridge crew watched as the Layfayette slid gracefully into orbit beside the Enterprise. Spock accompanied Kirk to the transporter room, leaving Sulu in command.

Captain Martain stepped down from the transporter pad followed by the medical staff assigned to Gilcorue.

Kirk stepped forward to greet his friend. "You made good time," he opened.

"Yes, your report to Starfleet was somehow given top priority. Jim, how do you manage to get replies so damn quick? If that had been one of mine I'd still be waiting this time next week," Martain responded as he turned to introduce the medical staff.

The introductions over, Kirk and his guests adjourned to the briefing room, as both Captains felt that the less time wasted the better. Kirk began to relate his experience to the newly-arrived group, who sat quietly as they listened to the story. Questions could be asked later; now was the time for them to absorb as much information on the culture and the specific problems the people were experiencing as they could.

The only interruption came when McCoy entered with a rather shaky Kirsty Ross by his side. Kirk rose and pulled up a chair for her and she thanked him with a smile. Kirk then asked if anyone had anything to say.

"Dr. Ross, you spent some time on the planet. What were your conclusions?" Janer, the head of the medical team, asked.

"It would seem from the readings I managed to take and the few examinations I made that there is one major problem we will be facing..."

"What problem? Re-education is not a problem in itself," Janer interrupted.

"Of the six people I examined five had genital problems in various stages. The older ones had limited deformities easily corrected by surgery, but the younger they were the more severe the problem was. It appears that the organs are atrophying through the lack of use. We are going to have to find some way of reversing the problem or there will not be any offspring from the youngest generation," Ross informed the gathering.

"But that does not mean that all the population are affected," Janer protested.

"Well, Dr. Janer, I just happen to agree with Dr. Ross's findings; but being a male I was not allowed to perform any internal examinations, as it is a crime for one male to touch another's wife or intended. Oh, they don't mind male doctors for minor complaints like a cold, but for anything that they need to strip for it's the female of the practice who deals with it," McCoy explained.

"That's why I'm going back down with the unit until you can get another female doctor from Sentanel out here," Ross dropped her clanger.

"But you're anything but well!" Kirk protested.

"I am fully recovered, Captain, and it is my duty to go, as it is yours to command your ship," she retorted dryly.

"Bones?"

"As of ten minutes ago all readings were normal. She's fully fit. And she's right, Jim - it is her duty to fill in here until a replacement can be arranged."

Kirk resigned himself to say no more. If McCoy had passed her fully fit there was nothing he could do or say that would keep her from doing her job - as nothing would keep him from his.

The briefing over, the medical team dispersed to arrange their equipment and transfer down to the planet's surface. Kirk headed for his cabin - he needed to be alone to examine just how he felt. As he sat down behind his desk he let his mind go blank, until the sound of his door buzzer brought him back to his senses.

"Come."

"I had to come and see you before I beamed back down to the planet," Kirsty Ross said quietly as she stepped just inside his door.

"Is there nothing I can say that will make you change your mind?" Kirk asked.

"No, Jim. My presence on the Enterprise would only cause you distress. It was not your fault that we did what we did. Please don't hold it against me," she asked.

"I don't. I blame myself."

"Don't. Circumstances forced us on each other."

"You know, I think you are right."

Ross turned to leave.

"Kirsty, are you...?" He did not know how to ask what he desperately needed to know. McCoy had told him, but...

"No, Jim, I'm not."

He sat for a moment after she left, his mind slowly turning back to the task at hand, the mounds of paperwork on his desk that he had neglected over the past week or so. With an outward groan he picked up his pen and made a start by signing the first report.



# SHE

by

Marcia Pecor

Faint vibrations from the Bridge deck inch upward in his frame.  
He leans back in the chair - familiar, yet not so - and closes  
his eyes, breathing deeply.

Sounds from years ago echo in the room - a time warp?

No, it's here and now, as hazel eyes glance at those who stand  
around him, dressed in Starfleet red.

But the sounds - sensors, relays, commlinks, all orchestrate  
the harmony of an earlier Enterprise, an older phantom of the  
poignant Genesis memory.

1701 - she was the best in the fleet...

Fine-tuned by Scott, Spock's computers untouchable by those in  
any other starship.

Hood's new class and transwarp drive were found lacking even  
next to her bruised and battered silhouette.

She set forth one last time, her passengers, driven, pushing  
her past limits of endurance.

Yet she took them to the dying planet and, in her death throes,  
marked a new beginning for those who survived her.

But what of 1701-A?

This untried ship of stars, state-of-the-art, transwarp drive  
(sorry, Scott), with the comfortable colours and deja-vu sounds, has  
yet to embark on her maiden voyage.

Will her helm respond to Sulu's touch?

Will her engines give one more nanogroan for the persistent  
Engineer?

Will her spirit intertwine with that man on the Bridge?

He looks at the viewscreen, his eyes alight in suppressed  
excitement.

She is state-of-the-art, yes, but she is also something else...  
She is theirs.

Spock's computers, Scott's engines, Uhura's communications -  
Theirs.

But most of all, she is his.

The vibrations thrumming in his body speak of his deepest  
convictions, his most secret of thoughts.

He had spoken them aloud only once, long ago, and now - he  
realises with a shock that it will always be true - he will never  
lose her.

Indeed, he never had.

Leaning forward, a smile plays across his features.

"Let's see what she's got."

Somehow, he already knows.

The vibrations alter subtly and he shivers to the very core.

Gathering herself, she soars...



# JUST A DREAM?

by

Martin Stahl

"Wumar." Uldio spoke softly, but determinedly said, "It is time to sleep now. Please go to bed."

"All right, Mum." The boy switched off the little screen at his armchair. He was very sorry that he had to stop reading his new book just now, at the most thrilling chapter. But he knew his mother; when she said it was time for bed, it was better to obey. If he had had a screen in his sleeping room he could read secretly in his bed. He wanted to know now what happened to the crew of the Spaceship. Were they able to resist the alien invader? If...

"Wumar...."

"Yes, Mum. I go to bed. Good night."

"Good night."

"Good night." This was from Wumar's father Prath who was sitting at his reading screen.

Wumar left the living room and went to his sleeping room. He took off his clothes and entered the sonic shower. Only some families in Sranfera, the largest city of the continent Arwa, could afford a sonic shower, and Wumar was very proud that his family was so rich that he even had his own sonic shower. He enjoyed the ticklish beams for some minutes. When he had had enough, he left the shower and went to his bed. He sat down and looked out of the window, as naked as he was. The climate of the planet Cethusan was very mild, the nights were warm, therefore the Cethusans did not wear any clothing in the night.

The house of Prath and Uldio was at the edge of Sranfera, therefore there were only some lights on the street when it was dark. Wumar did not fear the dark, he enjoyed the rare dark nights. Today he was lucky; the three Cethusan moons did not usually allow him to see the stars, but tonight their position in their orbits coincided and none of them had risen yet. It meant that instead of one or more of the moons Wumar was able to observe the thousands of stars in the sky.

The system of Cethusan was in a star cluster, therefore the stars were much brighter than the stars one could see in Earth's sky. Wumar asked himself if there was life on the planets of these stars. He believed the Cethusans were not the only beings in the universe. He wrote for himself many stories about the encounter between Cethusans and alien life forms, and he read many more books about these encounters. His parents and many of his friends laughed about these stories, but Yro, a wise old woman, told him once that they had no cause to laugh. She did not know herself if there were other life forms, but it could be possible. She believed in them until she died, and Wumar swore to believe in them until his death - or until any person could prove the opposite.

Wumar stared at Eccazar, the brightest of all the stars in the sky. It was the star nearest to this solar system, and some years ago the astronomers discovered some planets circling Eccazar. But an analysis proved that the temperatures of three of the planets were too high to allow any life forms to exist. The only planet with a temperature that would allow life had an atmosphere of chlorine gas, and the astronomers and biologists agreed that no life form could develop in an atmosphere of chlorine gas. When Wumar heard this, he wrote a story about a civilisation living in such an atmosphere. And his parents laughed...

Suddenly, Wumar saw a bright stripe near Eccazar which disappeared after a short moment. A shooting star! But...

What's that? Wumar thought. Where he had seen the shooting star he now saw a little star. It was very faint, but that was not extraordinary. There were more faint stars than bright ones in the sky. The peculiarity of this star was that it was moving slowly.

It was the first time Wumar had seen something like this. It could not be an airplane - they did not fly in the night as this was too dangerous.

A satellite?

Wumar doubted this. There were only a few satellites orbiting Cethusan, and Wumar knew the orbits of each of them. No satellite which was able to be observed by the naked eye could be in this position now. And he would have heard if a new satellite had been launched.

At that moment Wumar heard a humming behind him. He turned and saw three figures of light and sparkle. And then the light and the humming were gone.

Three alien beings stood in front of the boy, beings such as he had never seen before. All three of them were larger than any Cethusan he knew; they had only two arms and two legs.

These poor aliens! Wumar thought for a moment. It is much easier to live with four arms and three legs. But they had more fingers than a Cethusan, and they had something on their heads Wumar had never seen before. It appeared to consist of many long pieces. On the head of one being they appeared light brown, on the heads of the two others they were black. They had these pieces even above their eyes! Their noses were much bigger than Wumar's, but their ears were smaller, though the pointed ears of one of the three were only a little smaller than a Cethusan's. The being with the brown things on his head wore a yellow shirt, while the other two wore blue. Their trousers and boots were black.

Wumar did not know if he should dare to talk to them, but they did not seem threatening. He decided to risk a few words.

"Hello," he said. "I am Wumar."

The being with the pointed ears spoke. His voice was very dark but soft. His language sounded strange; Wumar did not fully understand the words, but they sounded like, "I assume Mr. Scott did not set the correct transporter co-ordinates. I suggest leaving this place at once, Captain."

The other being in blue spoke too, louder than the first one.

"That damned transporter! I knew it!"

The alien with the yellow shirt took a small box from his belt and tipped up a little lattice, then he spoke into the box. "Kirk to Enterprise."

The box answered, "Yes, Captain."

"Scotty, you set the wrong transporter co-ordinates. We are standing in some sort of room and have encountered one of the inhabitants of this planet. Beam us up immediately."

Wumar regretted very much that he did not understand the meaning of what these three beings said. And then the sparkles appeared again on the bodies of the three aliens. They spread out and soon Wumar saw three sparkling figures. And then even these figures were gone. Wumar was alone again.

Now he realized what he had just discovered. He was the first Cethusan to encounter alien beings! There was life on other planets!

Excitedly, Wumar ran to the living room. "Mum! Dad!"

His parents stood and hurried to him. "What is it, my son?" Prath asked.

"I... I just encountered three... three people from outer space!"

"And where did you encounter them?"

"In my sleeping room!"

"And where did their spaceship land?"

"I don't know. They appeared in my room, spoke some words in a strange language and then disappeared again."

Uldio placed her lower right arm around Wumar's shoulders. "Wumar, don't you think yourself that it sounds very strange? It was just a dream."

"I'm not sure, Mum."

"But I am. It was just a dream. How can people from outer space appear in your room? Believe me, it was just a dream. Just a dream."

"I think your mother is right, Wumar. Go back to bed now, and don't dream such funny things again. Good night."

"Good night, Wumar."

Without saying a word, Wumar left the room.

"Well, my dear Uldio, I think the time has come for us to do something with Wumar. It is not good for him when the figures in these stories appear even in his dreams. Tomorrow I will speak with a psychiatrist. And it is better if our son does not read so many of these stories."

Prath went to Wumar's armchair and erased the tape with the story about the spaceship and the alien invaders.



# ANOTHER ALTERNATIVE

I heard the patter of his slippers on the stair,  
he's left his clothes,  
they are not important now.  
And I can feel the edge of the letter  
he's left  
under his pillow.  
I knew it would be there.

He's left me for you, James Kirk.  
No walls could hold him now.  
He'll search to the Galaxy's end to find you,  
and somehow I hope he does.

Last night I heard him cry out your name in his sleep.  
And I've waited in dread for this moment,  
though I knew it would come.  
When he left me for the only one he loves.  
I guess I was only someone to hold him  
and help him through the night.  
And though he was Vulcan I have seen the tears when he thought of you.

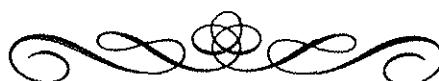
I will not open the letter because  
I know what it says.  
"I must go, Jim needs me".  
He will wish me peace and long life  
though I can never have peace without him.  
And perhaps my life will not be that long.  
The birth of his child may kill me  
and because of you, James Kirk  
I could not tell him  
for in duty he would stay by my side  
and his heart would die with you.

What a man you must be, James Kirk  
to inspire this greatness in him.  
I should hate you for stealing my Vulcan away,  
but I don't  
for in your cry of pain  
you have freed him.  
I get up and make some coffee,  
it's a new day and I must not grieve,  
so I begin to make plans for tomorrow  
- for the first time in my life I am alone.

My coffee is cold  
and I have cried all the tears I have to give.  
And all the answers I have to questions you would never ask me  
are locked away forever now.

(And what will I do when the night is so far,  
Shout 'I love you' to the stars).

Elaine Leeke





# SOME DAYS IT JUST DOESN'T PAY

by

Patricia de Voss and Tricia McKinlay

Leonard McCoy was not feeling well. He wondered if he would ever feel well again.

It was all Frazer's fault, too. 'Just one little drink for old time's sake.' Now as he waited to be transported back to the ship all he could think of was that Jim was going to kill him.

The transporter materialised a very red-faced McCoy. Kirk's disgusted expression was too much for the doctor in his present condition, so in a gesture of goodwill he opened his arms in a greeting as he stumbled down the steps.

"Hello there, Jim my boy."

Fortunately, Scott and Kyle were close by to stop him from falling totally to the floor.

"Damn transporter. Told you it was no good."

"Doctor, I seem to remember a promise that a certain person made that he wouldn't touch a drop."

"Captain, sir, I only had a few tiny drinks," he said, trying to indicate the size of the glass with his fingers. "Just to be soci... sociable... to be nice."

"Just how many 'tiny' drinks did you have?"

"I lost count after the first dozen, sir."

"Doctor, you will confine yourself to quarters until I can think up a suitable punishment. Mr. Scott, see that he gets there."

"Aye, sir."

"Ah, Jim-boy - there was something I was supposed to tell you. Now what was it... ?"

"Doctor, you are trying my patience."

"Come on, Leonard, before you get into any more trouble."

"But it was im...important... I think."

McCoy woke to an insistent pounding in his head. At first he couldn't locate the sound's source, then he recognised it as the communication panel on his desk. Angrily he threw a pillow at it, and rolled over on his other side with the remaining pillow covering his head. He was half asleep when he felt someone's hand on his shoulder.

"Dr. McCoy, you're wanted on the bridge," an unknown voice informed him.

"Go 'n find M'Benga. I've died and didn't leave a forwarding address."

"Sorry, sir, our orders are to take you to the bridge."

"Don't you understand? I've certified myself unfit for duty. So you can go and tell our beloved Captain that."

"Sir, if you don't come under your own steam we have orders to carry you."

"All right, damn it. I'll walk. Leave a person with some dignity!"

At this remark, one of the guards couldn't help but laugh. It would have been hard at any time to keep one's dignity intact while wearing a short purple silk nightshirt. Actually it wasn't so much the nightshirt that had the guards amused but rather the big embroidered dragon that seemed to stretch from the front right shoulder and lead down to where its tail ended at the back.

"Doctor, did you want to do anything first?"

"Jim wants me now, he gets me as I am." McCoy was not however aware of his present state of undress.

For the crew in the corridors it was a sight not to be forgotten in a long while. One game female even dared a wolf whistle as she walked past. McCoy's face turned a deep red as all the embarrassment seemed to be having a sobering effect on him. Neither were the bridge crew ready for what came out of the lift.

"All right, whose smart idea was this?" McCoy bellowed, half expecting to see Kirk's face wearing a smug expression. Then he noticed there wasn't any Kirk - or Spock, for that matter. Even Scott was nowhere to be seen. Uhura, having recovered from the initial shock, walked over to him and told him what had happened.

"Well, why pick on me? I'm a Doctor, not a..." The words trailed off as he caught some of the looks directed at him. He was beginning to feel increasingly naked.

"Doctor, you're the only officer on board with Command rank who isn't in Sickbay."

"I can soon fix that."

"Regulations state that the most senior officer available must take command."

The idea of the centre seat was starting to make him feel sick, but as it was the only vacant seat around, *any port in a storm will do*, he thought. Besides which, it felt good to be sitting down.

Then the Ensign at navigation asked him a question. Helplessly, he turned round and looked at Uhura, who gave him an

encouraging nod.

Now how would Jim do it? he thought.

"Carry on, Ensign." Feeling smug at having given his first order, he hit the intercom button and called up Sickbay.

Chapel answered.

"How are the patients?" He had a vague idea that he should have thought of that sooner, but in his still-inebriated state he felt that he had done well just remembering to ask. Besides, M'Benga was the doctor on duty right now. Not right poking in as if he didn't trust his subordinate...

"Should be up in a few hours."

"What's wrong with them?"

"Oh, nothing that a little rest won't put right."

"Serves them right. Maybe next time Jim won't be in such a hurry to get rid of me."

"Doctor, if I were you I'd be quiet. You're not in anyone's good books down here."

"Yeah? Well, I have a complaint I'd like to register about a certain regulation... McCoy out."

Just when he was going under for the third time, a goddess appeared with the liquid of life. Actually it was a yeoman with a cup of coffee, but to his foggy mind it was heaven-sent. Unfortunately, his sense of well-being didn't last too long, as the ship suddenly rolled to one side, making McCoy spill the hot coffee on his bare leg. It also came to him at that time that the female officer on helm was finding it hard to look in his direction without blushing. Promptly, and with more red covering his own face, he crossed his legs and tried to pull the nightshirt down over his knees.

"Bridge to Engineering. What's happening?"

No answer.

"Engineering! Somebody answer me!"

"Bridge. Lt. Wade here. One of the port stabilisers gave out. We're trying to locate the fault now. No other damage as yet."

"Want to bet?" McCoy remarked as he noticed the red spot that had appeared on his leg where the coffee had made contact.

The hours dragged on and on. Actually it had only been two hours since the mishap in Engineering, but to McCoy it seemed forever. His head was pounding worse than ever and all he wanted to do was crawl into some dark hole somewhere.

The sound echoed through the Bridge. A Lieutenant pushed the wrong button for the second time and swore at himself. It was a

sound uncommon to the normal working of the Bridge, a sound that seemed to hit Kirk and Spock as soon as they stepped out of the lift. It was coming from the centre seat.

McCoy, legs crossed, head resting on his hand, was sound asleep, snoring. Uhura moved silently over to the Captain and said, "He has had a rough day. We didn't have the heart to wake him."

Kirk went over to the sleeping Doctor and shook his shoulders gently. "Come on, Bones, wake up."

"Yeoman, whatever it is, sign it, lose it or order three more. Just don't bother me."

Kirk lifted McCoy and handed him to the waiting security guard. "Better take sleeping beauty back to his quarters."

"Yes, sir."

The next morning, McCoy joined Kirk and Spock at their table. McCoy's full tray of breakfast was enough to make Kirk feel slightly sick.

"Well, how are we all this morning?" Kirk didn't say a thing. "Come on, Jim, you can't still be mad at me?"

"No, Bones. It's just that I didn't get too much sleep last night."

"You and me both. I had the strangest dream. Imagine me in command!" McCoy half laughed.

Kirk coughed on the coffee he had been drinking.

"You all right, Jim?"

"Just went down the wrong way."

"You know, on the other hand, from what I remember, I wasn't half bad. If you ever want a few pointers..." He chuckled as he reached for his cup.

For a moment, Spock thought there would be murder on the spot, but instead Kirk simply replied, "Thanks, Bones, I'll remember that. Are you ready, Mr. Spock?"

As they were leaving, Spock turned to Kirk. "I did not think you would let the good Doctor off so easily."

"Who said I was? Would you care to join me down in the records department? I think we should give Bones something to remind him of his first day of command."

That night as McCoy headed back to his quarters he saw various crewmembers stop as they reached his door, look, and start laughing. Chris Chapel was one of the admiring audience.

"What's so funny?"

Chapel didn't say a word, but just turned McCoy around to face his cabin door.

"I did warn you," she added as she walked off, still laughing.

McCoy just stood in shocked horror. Fastened to the door there was a life-sized photo of him sitting in the Captain's chair wearing nothing but a purple nightshirt, with both him and the dragon looking completely at rest.



# POSSESSION

by

Linda Wood

Spock to cohabit her mind and body? The proposition Thalassa had just put to Christine Chapel made her body thrill with excitement and her mind recoil with apprehension and foreboding, but there was no time to ponder.

"Does Spock agree to the transfer?" she asked Thalassa.

"He has little option in the matter, Nurse Chapel. Henoah will not suspect that you are the receptacle of Spock's essence and Spock will form a mind-block to protect you. If you wish to save the life of your First Officer, you must agree."

"Please go ahead."

Christine felt the numbing impact of the transfer and, suddenly, he was there! Her mind reeled and spun as she felt the power of Spock's shining intellect and personality within her brain. She felt his persona, confused, disorientated, within her, and then quickly regain his mental balance. Outwardly, she walked out of sickbay as if in a trance, whilst Thalassa destroyed the globes. Inwardly, she was coming to terms with the crystal clear, diamond sharp, breathtakingly wonderful alien intellect within her. She felt herself perceiving external impulses in a different, exciting and - yes - totally alien way. She felt him experiencing and exploring the sensation of living within a Human female form, allowing him, in the privacy of her quarters, to let her hands trace the contours of her body.

¶How strange, and how beautiful.¶ Spock's mind-voice reverberated through her brain. ¶Your body is so light, so fragile, so - vulnerable!¶ Suddenly his wonderment changed to Vulcan formality. ¶Please forgive me for this totally abhorrent invasion of your person, Nurse Chapel.¶

She responded by allowing her mind to project the emotion of pure, chaste and infinitely deep love she felt for him, enveloping his diamond-hard entity in a cocoon of gentle love and by allowing her body to react pleasurable to that emotion. She felt Spock's persona recoil and spin away as if painfully burned by the experience, and then tentatively, cautiously, return and inquisitively explore the new sensations coursing through his/her mind and body. The diamond-brilliance mellowed to a gentle golden brown.

¶On the contrary, Mr. Spock,¶ she projected, ¶as you can feel, I find your presence neither abhorrent nor an invasion.¶

¶Indeed.¶ The familiar word was comforting to her mind-ear. Spock mentally compensated to damp down the overflow of emotions emanating from Christine's stimulated brain, then:

¶I can feel from Thalassa that this state of joint

*consciousness is only temporary, and that the return to my own body will take place on the bridge when the situation is resolved. Please proceed to the bridge.¶*

In the time it took for Christine to make her way there, Spock mind-wordlessly allowed her to experience that which was the essence of his being. In her mind's eye she saw the planet of his birth, the red sun of Vulcan, the searing desert of The Forge, the cool nights, the cry of the le-matya, the protective warmth of his childhood pet I-Chaya, the love of his Human mother and the aloofness of his Vulcan father, his loyalty to Starfleet and the total Oneness that was his depthless friendship for Kirk and McCoy. All this and more Spock shared with her in return for the temporary use of her body.

Christine's mind marvelled and her heart rejoiced as she stepped onto the bridge. She now knew Spock as no-one had ever known him before and might perhaps ever know him again. She was a part of him, and he a part of her.

Then she heard his mind-voice. *¶It is time, Christine. Prepare yourself for the parting.¶* And, as he had come, he now departed.

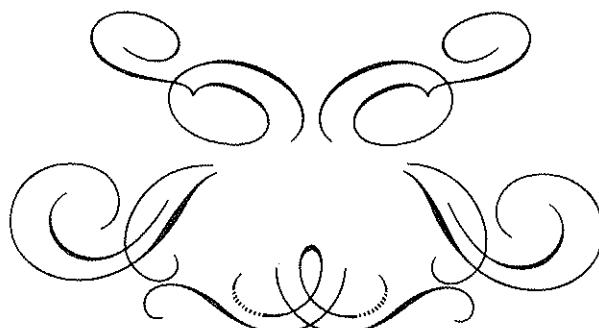
The glazed expression left her eyes and full awareness returned as she saw the blue-clad form lying prostrate on the deck come to life as the Vulcan picked himself up.

She felt alone - deserted. She had been one with him, now she was less than a half.

She realised, as she left the bridge, the incident concluded, that she would never be the same again, and would never want to marry a Human man, having experienced a communion so rare, so beautiful, that any other relationship would be a dull flicker in comparison. The physical act of love, although she had never allowed a man to love her, now seemed repellent after the combining of two minds in perfect symbiosis.

She returned to sickbay, the echoes of his being reverberating in her mind, a gentle smile on her face.

*At least he has given me this - and, she thought wryly, he did not make me... forget...*



# THE STARS' CALL

by

Sheila Clark

"It's bedtime."

"Yes, Mother." It never occurred to the boy to object, to plead for 'just five more minutes so that I can finish this'. He had been brought up to a strict tradition of obedience to his elders.

With a regretful glance at the last fifty or so pieces still remaining to be fitted into his jigsaw, followed by a resigned shrug - it would only take him a few minutes tomorrow night to finish it - he undressed quickly, pulled on his pyjama trousers and headed for the bathroom. He washed his hands thoroughly - he hated the feel of dirty hands - splashed water over his face and, in the manner of boys the universe over, totally ignored the demands of the back of his neck to the attention of soap and water. His teeth were quickly brushed - his mother, he knew, would quickly detect his failure to do so if she did not smell the toothpaste on his breath. Within eight minutes of his mother's call, he was in bed.

Exactly ten minutes after she called, his mother walked into his room and crossed to the bed. She bent over him, kissed his cheek, and said, "Goodnight, son. Sleep well."

"Goodnight, mother."

She put the light out and closed the door.

He waited for another five minutes - long enough for her to return downstairs, settle in her favourite chair and pick up her sewing.

He got up and moved on whisper-soft feet to the window, knowing, even in the total darkness, exactly where it was and how many steps it would take to reach it - it was a trip he made nearly every night. Carefully, he moved a curtain aside, wondering, as he always did, why his mother insisted on having the curtains drawn - the night outside was nearly as dark as the blackness inside the room.

But outside was the night sky, dotted with stars - some brilliant, some faint; some visible every night during this season, some only seen on frosty nights.

This was a night of frost, and the stars were brilliant. He gazed up at them, automatically identifying the visible constellations even although the main stars were almost lost in the mass of stars that were usually so faint that they only showed on such a night as this.

He sighed. The stars called to him as nothing else did. Given a free choice he would select a career that would take him out there, into space. But he did not have a free choice and he knew

that only a miracle would ever give him one. It was expected that he would follow his father's career, and his training in it had already begun, young though he was. That he had no interest in it, no real aptitude for it (as his father had) had never been considered. His parents' attitude was that even if a child expressed an interest in one particular career, it was most likely to be a passing fancy; that he was as yet too young to know what he wanted to do; that they knew better than he did what was best for him. They believed that given the proper training he would develop an interest in the work he was being taught to do.

He continued to gaze hungrily at the stars for many minutes. If only his parents were progressive, like his friend Sumo's, and willing to let him at least try to break loose from the family mould! Though the boy had to admit to himself that perhaps it was not so much a progressive viewpoint as their wish to see Sumo better his station in life.

As always, cold drove him back to bed after about half an hour, and he stretched his toes down to the bed-heater, grateful that he was allowed that little luxury during the cold winter nights.

He was still wide awake, and lay wishing for the arrival of the magic tenth birthday, only a few weeks away, when he would be allowed to stay up for a whole extra hour.

He sighed again, trying to attain the proper attitude of gratitude for parents who were interested enough in his future to train him for it (little though he liked the work for which he was being trained). And it was, after all, a double training - his father, while actively following a diplomatic career, had, in his youth, been taught that it was his duty to maintain an interest in the running of the family estate; an estate which had belonged to his family for generations. That he had no real interest in a rural life and let his estate manager, a conscientious and loyal employee, make the major decisions, was, in his view, unimportant; he spent a few days each year going over estate matters with the manager and knew exactly what was going on - and he was training his son to accept the same sense of duty. At least one day each week was spent with the estate manager. The boy found those days more interesting than the many hours spent with his father, hearing about boring diplomatic problems and the even more boring techniques of negotiation, and he had already decided that when the time came, if he could not choose his own life, he would concentrate on the estate.

For he could summon up no enthusiasm for diplomacy or politics, the only alternative he would be allowed; as for the protracted negotiation in which his father excelled, his youthful logic considered it unnecessary. If men of goodwill on both sides got together, he believed, and treated each other with honesty, trade agreements, etc, could be accomplished in half an hour instead of half a year, and with a great deal less acrimoniousness than was often the case.

The boy closed his eyes and tried to sleep, but the harder he tried the wider awake he felt. He heard his parents' footsteps on the stair and then the soft sound of their door closing, and knew he had been in bed for at least two hours.

He got up again and returned to the window, but even the stars failed to hold his attention this time. He felt restless and had no idea why.

Then he realised at least part of what was wrong. There seemed to be a strange hush in the night - usually there would be the call of night birds, the squeaking of nocturnal animals, the distant howl of a hunting predator. Tonight there was nothing.

Puzzled, but satisfied that he had identified the reason for his wakefulness - he must have noticed the unnatural silence without registering it - he allowed the cold to drive him back towards his bed.

He was half way there when with a suddenness that was all the more shocking for its strangeness, the whole house shook violently.

Earthquake! The boy had never experienced one, but realised instantly that that was all it could be. He turned and scrambled back towards the window, reaching it just as a crashing sound behind him announced the collapse of at least part of the building. He pulled the window open and leaned out, groping for the coiled rope fastened at the side of the window, there in case of fire. Glad of the regular practice his mother had insisted on, he shook it loose and slid quickly down it. The ground had steadied again, but just the same he ran, ignoring the pain when his bare foot came down on a sharp pebble, putting distance between him and the house just as he had been taught to do if there was a fire.

At the edge of the garden he stopped and looked back, only half aware of voices shouting somewhere not too far away.

The outline of the house, as seen against the backdrop of stars, looked wrong, and with a feeling that everything that was secure in his life had collapsed he registered that part of the roof had fallen in. Even as he watched, a bit more of the roof fell with a crash that seemed to echo all the way from the ten-mile distant extinct volcano.

Child-like, his first positive realisation was that he would never now be able to finish his jigsaw. Then, almost as strongly as before, the ground shook again with a grating, rumbling sound that filled him with terror, sending him to his knees. Still more of the roof fell in, and fear for his parents hit him.

Although distant rumbling could still be heard, the ground steadied again, and he scrambled to his feet, for the first time fully registering the sound of a panic-stricken animal somewhere in the grounds and the distant voices. They seemed to be coming from the general direction of the servants' quarters. He headed that way. Manager Satti would know what to do.

At the servants' quarters - a group of small houses some quarter of a mile from the main house - he found chaos. All of the buildings had collapsed and one of them was on fire. The flames lit the area around with a red glow that seemed a portent of further disaster. There was no sign of Satti. Nearly half of the junior servants seemed to be there, but none of the senior ones; nobody seemed to know what to do.

One of the kitchen maids saw the boy and to his horror the servants clustered round him, begging for instructions. What should they do? What could they do?

"Where is Manager Satti?" he asked, trying to sound more confident than he felt.

"Nobody has seen him," was the reply. "It is his house that is burning."

The boy looked at the burning ruin, and shuddered. Anyone inside there was hopelessly trapped. He hoped that Satti - and the other senior servants, who lived in the same house - had been killed by the falling building before the fire started.

"And my father?"

"We haven't seen him either."

"Then we should try to find him. He will know what to do."

The boy directed the men to go to the main house and look for his parents. Not caring who gave the orders, as long as someone did, they obeyed without question.

He turned to the women, trying to remember what he had read about earthquakes. "We will need some sort of shelter until morning, even if it's only some sort of tent. We shouldn't be too close to anything that could fall on us." Even as he spoke he guessed that very little in the area would be left standing - not after two major shocks.

The distant rumbling got louder, terminating in an explosion that left the boy temporarily deafened. Moments later, he was sent flying by a blast of hot air. He rolled over and over, coming to a halt against the remains of a wall with a thump that left his body aching all over. What had happened to the servants, he had no idea. He guessed that the women, at least, must have been thrown somewhere close to him, but although he called out he got no reply.

He lay still for a bare moment, then scrambled to his feet as ash began to rain down on him. Choking - the air seemed filled with the stuff - he pulled his pyjama jacket over his head, wincing as hot ash landed on his unprotected skin.

If he had been a little older, the sense of responsibility for his dependants that he had already been taught would probably have kept him there, trying to help them. As it was, his very youth saved him. The instinct for survival took over. He had to get away!

The ash had smothered the fire in the burning house, but in the distance he could see a red glow, not quite bright enough to light the dark night. Something told him that the danger was coming from that glow. He turned and began to stumble away from it.

Somewhere ahead of him he heard a terrified horse whinnying again and again. He groped his way towards the sound, finding the stable, by some freak, hardly damaged. The beast - the only one in the stable - was a young mare, stalled because it had been planned to take her to the stallion within the next day or two. She trusted men, and his presence calmed her sufficiently for him to saddle and bridle her, even though he was hampered by having to do it by feel. Remembering the ash, he searched for a cloth; finding a rag that one of the grooms used to clean the harness, he wrapped it round her nose and mouth, tying it to the bridle. He led her to the door, scrambled into the saddle and gave her her head.

The tired mare had long since dropped to a walk as a reluctant dawn half penetrated the darkness. In the dim light he saw the desolation around him; ash-covered, everything was a uniform grey. He glanced back, and saw a red and black silhouette against a dark grey background - a huge, threatening cloud hugging the dark summit of the old volcano.

Not until then did he realise that the volcano, thought to have been extinct for twenty thousand years, had erupted.

The air was still full of a fine ash and he guessed that it would take many days to settle.

The mare stumbled, and he reined her in. She could not go much further without a rest. He did not know how far he would have to go to find help; but even in his shocked state he realised that he stood more chance on horseback than he would on foot. He dismounted and sat leaning against a boulder, looping the reins firmly around his wrist. He, too, was tired; he dozed uneasily, wakening often. He was close to the end of his endurance.

The day remained dark as the thick layer of ash from the volcano blotted out most of the light. When he guessed it was noon, he remounted and urged the still-tired mare onwards.

Nearly an hour later, he heard an engine, and roused himself enough to look round. A four-wheel drive heavy-duty land vehicle was lurching its way towards him.

It stopped beside him and a man jumped out. "You're safe now," he said. Then - "God, you're just a kid!"

The boy swayed, the exhaustion that nervous energy had held at bay overcoming him with the arrival of help and the realisation that he no longer had to depend on himself to reach safety. The man caught him as he toppled from the saddle; he clung desperately to his helper, seeing in him a symbol of safety in a world that had suddenly become hostile. He had been taught that it was wrong to cry, that men did not cry; but now that he knew he was safe his overstrained nerves defeated his control and he sobbed helplessly.

"You'll be all right, son." The man patted his back awkwardly, not very sure how to deal with a child's tears. "You're safe now. You'll be all right," he repeated over and over.

At last the harsh sobbing eased to an uneven breathing. The man breathed a silent sigh of relief. He could cope with this. "Anyone else back where you come from?" he asked gently, prepared to hear the child say 'My parents'; he guessed that the boy's parents had sacrificed themselves by giving him the horse and telling him to ride for his life.

"I don't know... I think everyone else was killed," he mumbled, too numb with shock and exhaustion for it to mean much yet.

"Come on, then. We'll get you back out of this."

"Wait - my horse. You can't leave her... I won't leave her."

"There's no room for her," the man pointed out. "She'll be all right."

"No... she saved my life. I won't leave her here alone."

There's nothing for her to eat or drink."

The man glanced back at his companion in the cab. The driver shrugged as he reached for his radio. "I guess I'd feel the same. Search car seventeen here, co-ordinates 2354.5510. We've found a kid alive, but he refuses to leave his horse. Can someone come out and collect it?"

There was a brief silence. "Arranging to have it beamed out. Is it his own horse or just one he found?"

"She's mine - at least, she belonged to my father, but I think he must be dead. I didn't see him after the house collapsed in the earthquake." The boy's voice trembled; his control was still tenuous.

"All right. She'll be looked after for you. You'll be able to claim her once you've been checked out by the doctors. Car seventeen - we'll beam the kid out too. Carry on with your search."

"On our way."

The mare shimmered away, and moments later, another transporter beam caught the boy.

The estate was gone, covered with volcanic ash; the buildings were all flattened, the weakened stable having gone in one of the aftershocks. The land was still his, however, and in a few years things would begin to grow there again; in a few more years it would be possible to begin farming it again. Several of their pedigree animals, that had fled in terror from the earthquake, were found and formed the basis of a new herd which continued the bloodline that the family had been building up for four generations. Although the insurance companies refused to reimburse anyone for property and lives lost in the eruption under the terms of the small print, there was plenty of money banked and the boy inherited it all; the bodies of his parents, crushed by the falling roof of their home, were recovered some weeks later. The boy's uncle, his father's younger brother, gave him a home while he grew up; and when he finally left, promised that the mare would continue to be well looked after.

Ten years after the eruption, able now to choose his own career, Hikaru Sulu walked through the doors of Starfleet Academy on his way to the stars.



I HAVE BEEN  
AND ALWAYS SHALL BE  
YOUR FRIEND

by

Patricia de Voss

"I have been and always shall be your friend. Remember when you first..." But the sentence was not finished as the body went limp in his strong arms.

He remembered the last time those words were used, and what it had cost the person he now held. It seemed so long ago now. Silently he cursed his own heritage, that would give him another life yet to live, an empty, barren life, without friends, without him.

The funeral service was to be held in the coming week. He feared going. He had said his goodbye, why suffer through it again? There would no doubt be a lot of the top brass there, people who had been assigned to attend. But what of his friends? The passage of time had taken its toll of most of them, and those who had escaped aging were the ones who had already lost their lives in service. He had watched his friend die a little each time news had arrived of their deaths, till he had contracted a virus himself and was too weak to fight it off. Those last few precious moments of life, when Spock desperately tried to hold on to his friend, and the last few words he had heard, words that no-one else would. As he had done before to hold on to him, the link had been strong, the message he received unwelcomed.

*Not this time, my friend. Let me go, please!* This time Spock had not argued the point. He knew in his heart that even if he saved him, it would only be for his own needs. The need of his friend to die with dignity was more important now.

He sat alone in his quarters, deep in meditation, till the sound of the door buzzer announced the arrival of someone.

"Come." His voice was almost inaudible.

The door opened, and to his total surprise, in walked Pavel Chakov; but no longer the young lad he remembered so well. The advancing years having taken their toll of him, still he held himself with a sense of pride.

"Admiral - I did not expect..."

"You didn't think I would miss it, did you?"

"With your position, I thought..."

"You don't know, then. My retirement papers have finally come through. As my last official act, I got Peter and myself here on time."

"I'm sorry, I had forgotten to enquire about Peter's whereabouts."

"He will be here some time tomorrow. I tried to contact Dr. Marcus, but either she wasn't getting my messages, or just wouldn't answer them."

In a way, Spock was glad, for she had not spoken to Kirk since the day David died. It had hurt him so much, all the repeated messages unanswered, until he sent no more.

"I tried to get Captain Saavik here, but she was just too far out. Even with transwarp, they would still never have made it here on time."

"It seems you have taken care of everything. Things I should have done."

"I made a few calls, that was all." Then he produced a bottle, went to a cupboard and brought out two glasses, filled them and handed one to Spock, who accepted without hesitation.

"To James T. Kirk," Chekov said as he raised his glass in tribute, and the gesture was echoed by Spock. He wanted to do more, but didn't know how. The only person who could ever get through to Spock was gone. He wondered what Spock would do now. He was still young by Vulcan standards. Would he re-enter the Service, or continue to stay on Vulcan?

Chekov sat, later that night, in his own quarters, deep in thought. He wanted no-one at the funeral except those who had been close to Kirk; he didn't want people there just because it was a duty assigned to them, or so they could say they had been at James T. Kirk's funeral.

Not one of them really knew more than what had been written up for historical purposes. They didn't know the man, they only knew the image that had been built up around him. After Genesis they had all risked their lives and careers to find and bring Spock back, and Kirk had been the driving force throughout the whole thing. None of them ever really expected to get back into Starfleet. That was, until Vulcan decided to pull out of Starfleet on the grounds that the Human members didn't really understand their alien needs. That maybe they should never have tried for alien contact, if they weren't prepared to make allowances for their differences. This inspired other non-Human races to come to the same conclusion. The Federation was in dire trouble; with all its non-Human members threatening to pull out and Klingon and Romulan ships massing along the borders waiting for the collapse. It was the worst crisis the Federation had faced since its beginning.

In the end, it had been Kirk and Spock who had solved the problem, gaining for the former Enterprise crew the chance to resume their careers, and for them new careers as Ambassadors to Vulcan.

Months later, looking back on that day, Chekov felt it was one of the longest days he'd ever lived through. The funeral was military, and formal words were spoken by unknown Admirals on how valuable a man Kirk had been. Spock looked close to collapse, and

he surely would have done if Chekov hadn't decided to get him out of there. He had checked on him the day before he was due to return to Earth, and the Vulcan was a lot better and seemed more at ease. He had stated that he had his own plans for his future. That was the last time he had ever seen him; the last time anyone ever saw him. Spock had purchased a small one-man craft and left for parts unknown.

Every now and then, Starfleet would receive scientific reports from various systems. No-one ever found out who was sending them.

No-one ever tried.



# A MICK TIME

A STAR TREK parody

by

Manuela Rietano

Kirk hurried to the lift, still trying to comb his ruffled hair. His shift had begun at 0730 hours, and he was, as usual, one hour late. This was because his nights were always more tiring than his day shifts as Captain of the Enterprise. And particularly this last night had been sooo wonderful, not easy to forget. A pity that Lt. McPherson had to transfer to the USS Nelson... She had taught him a few tricks that were real dynamite! He would miss her a lot, a lot indeed...

As he reached the lift, McCoy halted him. "Captain, got a minute?"

"Huh?" answered Kirk, still sleepy, fumbling for his pockets and suddenly realising that Starfleet uniforms had no pockets. "I'm sorry, Bones, I have nothing. Not even a mere thirty seconds."

"No, you stupid!" snapped the Doctor. "I meant figuratively! I only want to talk to you!"

"Oh..." answered Kirk, deadpan. "Why didn't you say so the first time?"

"Never mind, Captain... I want to talk to you about Spock..."

"Spock? What's wrong with Spock?"

"Well, maybe it's just nothing... but... he hasn't been eating since last week, and..."

"Now when do you bother about wasted food? Maybe Spock just decided to start another of those silly diets of his... keeps saying he's 'fat'! You know already that it won't last long. Don't worry," said the Captain, tapping the Doctor's shoulder and starting to leave. But McCoy restrained him.

"No, wait Captain. It's not all that simple. If Spock weren't a Vulcan..."

"In fact, he's not Vulcan, he's half Human."

"JIM!" The Doctor was losing his patience. "Try to be serious, just for once!"

"But I am serious!" he protested.

"Well, I don't know what to do. Every time I enter his cabin, that beast he has brought aboard from Vulcan and that he dares to call 'pet' starts roaring at me and licking his lips in a way that I really don't like... God knows what he's used to eating..." The Doctor looked absently at the ceiling. "But it's also true that the

beast knows you better than he knows me... it's not a mystery that you've started practising in the Vulcan's quarters quite often and at odd hours, too..." McCoy was now looking at his nails.

"Are you by any chance insinuating that Spock and I..."

"Who, me, Captain?" answered McCoy, innocence personified. He smiled meaningfully. "We all know that all you do is enjoy playing chess with your good Vulcan First Officer. What else? Anyway, why don't you go and talk to him? When you've time, of course."

"ME? Why is it always me?" complained Kirk.

"Because you are the one who gets the biggest cheque of us all!" answered McCoy, heading straight to sickbay.

Kirk entered the dimly lighted cabin of his First Officer and almost stumbled on a nearby chair. "Damn!" he swore.

Spock was busy watching the viewscreen and had not noticed Kirk's arrival.

"Well, Spock, McCoy tells me there's something wr..." began Kirk, moving closer to the viewscreen and Spock.

"SHHH! Wait! Sit down and wait! Keep silent! Just five minutes more!" Spock almost whispered without looking away from the screen. Kirk glanced at it, sighed and obediently sat down on the bed.

"...and next week the crew of the Enterprise will again meet Harry Mudd for another exciting adventure! Don't miss STAR TREK on Channel 2001..."

Spock switched off the screen and turned to his Captain. "Did you want to ask me something?"

"Yes. How can you waste your time with that silly holovision series?"

"It's not a silly series! How can you say that if you've never watched a single episode? And - "

"Never mind, Spock! A ship that goes back and forth through space with a little green pointed-eared..." He made a gesture of disgust. "Anyway, McCoy told me that you are increasingly nervous and irritable and that you haven't eaten since last week. Something troubling you?"

"Why do you want to know?" asked Spock.

"Well, first because I'm curious... and second because being the Captain I'm supposed to know everything. So spit it out, man!"

Spock got up and began pacing the room, hands clasped behind his back. "During these past weeks I've been thinking. And pondering. Lots of pondering. And I've concluded that I do not like this situation. I understand that rank has its privileges, but when it's enough, it's enough!"

Kirk had never seen his First Officer so angry... not since the

last joke he played on him when he had put a handful of pins on the Vulcan's chair on the bridge and he had sat down heavily and had to remain in bed for a week... face down. "Enough of what?" asked Kirk, completely puzzled.

Spock stopped pacing the room and looked at Kirk, who was still sitting on the bed. "Captain, in every single story since we started this series, it has been you who always got the girl. Every single story! I'm sick and tired of having to stand here, doing nothing and watching all this fooling around of yours! Do you think I'm made of wood? I want to be the one who gets the girl from this story on!"

Kirk couldn't believe his ears. "You want to do what?"

"You heard me. I do not want to repeat myself."

"But Spock... try to be patient..."

"I've run out of patience!"

"But you know you can't... now..."

"What is it that I can't do?" Spock's usual satanic look was even more satanic now.

"Er... well... Everyone knows that you... Well... you do... that only once-every-seven-years."

Spock grasped Kirk's collar, hauled him up and slammed him against the wall. "Who has been the guy who put around this story? Maybe you, eh?" Spock tightened his grip on Kirk.

"No, no, no! The producer said that, and it was also in the script..." Kirk tried desperately to pull free.

"Yes, of course - the 'producer'... And it's not a secret to anyone that you also have script approval. Now listen to me." And so saying he released Kirk who slumped on the floor. "I'm capable of that every time I want. And how long I want. And even better than you!"

"Better than ME?" It was now a matter of pride. "That's impossible. No-one is better than me on this ship!"

"Wanna bet?" asked Spock, a smug smile on his face.

Kirk's mind was racing fast. If it was true that Vulcans were superior to Humans in strength, mental capabilities, endurance and so on... it was logical to assume they were superior also in... that! He could not permit himself to risk his reputation, could he?

"Ah," said Spock. Then he went to his bookshelf and took down a huge volume. With carefully planned nonchalance he opened it, running down the page with his finger. Then after a long moment of silence, he looked up at Kirk.

"You still here?"

"Uh... yes. No, I mean - I was just leaving," Kirk said, running his hand through his hair thoughtfully. Spock returned to his volume. Kirk was about to leave, but on second thoughts he approached the Vulcan, glancing at the huge book.

"Say... what's that?" he asked.

"This? Oh, it's my address book. Never seen one?"

"Oh," was all Kirk could say, thinking about his.

After the first moment of incredulity and amazement, Kirk smiled at his First Officer, circling his shoulders with one arm. At the gesture, Spock raised a quizzical eyebrow.

"Dear friend..." started Kirk. "We have been sharing dangers and battles since the beginning of our mission. We shared laughter... No, you didn't... Anyway, we shared joy and sorrow, victory and defeat -" Kirk was really into the passionate speech - "day in and day out... my life is in your hands, yours in mine. Dear Spock," he said, moving even closer, "can we share - ?"

"No."

"Just a page...?"

"No!"

"Half a page...?" pleaded Kirk.

"NO!"

"Okay. I was just asking. There's no harm in asking."

"Yes, you asked, and I answered you," said Spock.

"Well... It's late and I'm due on the bridge..." lied Kirk, who wanted only something very strong to drink. Spock didn't even deign to lift his eyes.

And a very depressed Captain left the Vulcan's quarters, feeling as if his life was falling apart...

Captain's Log, Stardate 2347.08... My First Officer altered course for Vulcan and beamed down to the planet almost half an hour ago... He left me tied hand and foot and gagged inside my quarters which he locked with a code lock... I hope someone will notice my absence sooner or later and come here and untie me before the end of this episode...

Unfortunately it was later rather than sooner, and many hours passed before the crew of the Enterprise realised that their Captain was missing. A Class One search of the whole ship revealed that Kirk was in his quarters, unable to answer. So after a long time of waiting, Kirk heard a noise outside in the corridor. Then he recognised Scott's voice. "We'll have to cut through the bulkhead! There's no other way to open the door. Gimme that phaser!"

Kirk mumbled something under the gag. The muffled sounds meant, 'Hurry up, you out there! I do not want to be an off-camera character for the rest of the story!'

It took another hour. It was 1100 hours - on the following

day - but at last Scott and his men were able to free the Captain. An angered Kirk left command with Scott, not even thanking him, and hurriedly beamed down to Vulcan with McCoy.

Vulcan.

Hot. Sunny.

It was noon when they materialised on the planet's surface. Being on Vulcan at noon was like being inside a volcano's mouth. Kirk and McCoy found themselves in the midst of a desert plain, with not even a tree or a bar or beach facilities.

"I told Scotty to beam us down into the city, not... here, in this godforsaken desert!" complained Kirk, looking around.

"You'll have to talk to Scotty one of these days, Jim," said McCoy. "Since Spock talked him into watching Star Trek, he's no longer the same man!"

"Yes, I noticed. All he says now is 'Beam me up' whenever he meets me. One day or another I'll have to destroy all these Star Trek holo tapes in the library computer," sighed Kirk.

"I wouldn't do that, Jim, unless you want a mutiny..."

"It's really all that serious?" asked Kirk.

McCoy eyed him. "Yes, Jim, it is."

"Well... we can devote another episode to the matter. We are here to find Spock, and fast! Let's go!"

They began walking. It promised to be a long way to Vulcan's main town, Shikahr.

From time to time McCoy tried a little conversation. "Huh, sunny here, isn't it?"

"Yeah - and my nose is all red already. Say, you haven't forgotten the sun lotion, have you, Bones?"

"How could I have forgotten it? This new product will give you a long-lasting tan all the while protecting and nourishing your skin, and its hydrating properties will - "

"Drop your commercial style details! Give me that bottle!" snapped Kirk, snatching away the lotion from McCoy's hands and splashing it generously all over his face.

After a few hours' walk they finally reached Shikahr. They searched every bar and coffee shop; all the more or less dubious night clubs and even some even more dubious massage parlours... and they looked even in those particular places Vulcans pretended to know nothing about... but they found no trace of Mr. Spock.

They were about to give up, when...

...when amid the green leaves of a hidden bush just out of the city limits, they spotted a Starfleet blue uniform shirt hanging on the branches.

"That must be Spock's shirt," said Kirk softly, pointing at it. They both carefully approached the bush.

"SPOCK!" shouted Kirk.

The green leaves frowned. The Vulcan startled. He had recognised the voice. An angry face appeared between the leaves.

"Kirk! What the hell are you doing here? How did you...?" he asked, his anger barely suppressed.

"Spock," McCoy began cheerfully. "We've been looking for you for hours!"

Spock sat up, brushing away the leaves and trying to recover his dignity. The face of a Vulcan girl appeared. A lovely Vulcan girl, thought Kirk. "Why don't you introduce us to the lovely lady here?" suggested Kirk, straightening his shirt, adjusting his hair, showing off his muscles and soon forgetting both Spock and the reason why he had come to Vulcan.

The 'lovely lady' diverted her attention to the newcomers, smiling at Kirk and blinking her eyes several times. "Mon p'tit chou, who are these people? Do you know them?" she asked.

At this point, Spock's face had all the colours of the rainbow at the one time. Kirk and McCoy looked at each other then they both looked at Spock and started laughing. Between tears and laughter, Kirk muttered something and they went on laughing louder and louder, Spock patiently waiting, tapping his foot.

"My god, Spock," said Kirk, rubbing his watering eyes, "I didn't know that! Mon p'tit chou! As soon as the whole crew..." and he started laughing again. McCoy stuck his elbow in his side, attracting his attention. Spock eyed Kirk and it was a very savage look.

"This is my... friend... James Kirk," said Spock.

"Captain James Tiberius Kirk, commanding the USS Enterprise of the United Federation of Planets," corrected Kirk.

"And this is T'Pring. Dr. McCoy."

T'Pring was looking intently at Kirk who returned the look with equal intensity plus some other things.

"I have never met a Human before. But I've read a lot of books about your... customs..." said T'Pring, moving closer to Kirk.

"Yes... I too have read a lot of books about yours... from all my vast experience on the subject... there are a few things... I could never have conceived of..." Kirk smiled the best smile out of his collection. He went on, "My duty as a Starfleet officer is to seek out new life forms..." he murmured, passing his fingers through T'Pring's hair.

"You have just found one..." T'Pring smiled meaningfully. "On my planet, loyalty to one's duty is the most important thing..." she almost whispered and touched his ears. "I like rounded ears... and yours are very sexy, didn't you know?" Kirk held her. "No-one has ever held me in this way..."

Their lips met.

T'Pring was oblivious of everything except the handsome and tanned Captain who was holding her. Between passionate kisses and caresses she murmured, "I know of a place... it's not far from here... no-one will disturb us..."

Smiling fondly at her he also whispered, "Yes, a quiet place..."

"Come, then," she said, showing him the way. Kirk followed her, both barely restraining their passion...

McCoy had politely stepped away, looking absently at the branches, the grass, the trees, the flowers... Spock was hypnotised, watching the whole scene as if it were a dream. He had not expected T'Pring to act that way, and in front of him. The shock had been too much for even his Vulcan stamina. Yes, he concluded, *logic calls for a healthy release of emotions*. As he watched the two going away, he fell on his knees, weeping silently.

McCoy approached him and put a comforting hand on the Vulcan shoulders. "C'mon, Spock, stop crying. You're a Vulcan, remember? You are not supposed to show emotions."

"But I'm not a Vulcan! I'm half Human!" Spock continued to cry, face in his hands. Then he looked up.

"T'Pring!" he called aloud to the empty surroundings. "T'Pring!" He looked at the Doctor. "Where are they? What are they doing?"

The Doctor smiled. "Use your imagination, will ya?"

Spock was thoughtful for a moment. Then his face contorted in horror and disgust. "No..." he whispered. Then, aloud, "NO! You can't do that with my T'Pring! Damn you, Kirk! Noooo....!"

Then he stood, regaining his composure. "Doctor, I have a duty to perform. It won't take long..."

McCoy was really concerned now. This was not a drama story, it was supposed to be fun. "No, Spock. Wait!" he said, grabbing the Vulcan's arm.

"No, Doctor. You can't stop me and I can't stop myself from doing it. It's the custom of my people..."

"Spock, for heaven's sake! Listen to me! Don't do something you may regret later!"

Spock eyed him, one eyebrow up. "Regret? Why should I regret it later? I never regretted it; instead, I felt relieved."

"No... regret?"

Spock realised the Doctor was not following him, so he patiently explained, "Doctor, I just want to fulfil a physiological need behind that bush. Now will you release my arm, or do you want me to do it in front of you?"

McCoy released him. "For god's sake, Spock, no! Go! Go!"

A couple of minutes later, Spock returned. "Ah, I'm feeling much better now," he said.

"Now, Spock, try to relax. There's nothing to worry about..." began McCoy.

"Nothing to worry about?" exclaimed Spock. "Don't you know the Captain? Don't you know the kind of things of which he is capable?"

"I do not know. Do you, Spock?"

"Doctor!" said Spock, visibly offended by McCoy's insinuation.

"Sorry, Spock. Guess I just got carried away with all those K/S zines I read. Anyway..." The Doctor hastily changed the subject before Spock could ask him more about the zines. "As I was saying, there's really nothing to worry about."

"I do not understand, Doctor."

"Well, remember the old trick of the tri-ox compound? Well, I acted on my Human instinct... and on the way here I shot him with a potent drug that in its good time will make him... er... completely... ehm... incapable... er... you know what I mean..."

"Totally... incapable?" repeated Spock, sceptically.

"One hundred per cent."

Spock thought for a moment. "Doctor, I've often found myself disagreeing with you. But this time, given the circumstances, I have to admit that your actions were guided by a most flawless logic!"

"I am honoured, Spock."

Some time later, Kirk beamed back to the Enterprise. Once aboard he headed straight to his cabin, ordering Scott that no-one was to disturb him, not even if the whole Universe was shrinking again into a ball of protoplasm.

Once inside his quarters, he threw himself on the bed, staring at the ceiling.

He felt ashamed, deceived, depressed, distressed, frustrated, humiliated, miserable, mortified, poor, upset, worried, deeply wounded in his honour and with an overwhelming feeling of impotence... Such a thing had never happened to him. NEVER!

Vulcan women were no different from Human women - or alien women, for that matter. So why he just couldn't... Maybe the heat? Or the air? Vulcan gravity? Nay, gravity had never affected him *that* way! "Come on, J.T.," he said to himself. "Certainly it's only a temporary problem... But... no, NO! Maybe it's me! I've contracted some sort of unknown and mysterious space disease... I'm ill! I'm finished! What is my life going to be?"

He was lost in his trail of sad and miserable thoughts when the door buzzer sounded. "Hey, Jim! Are you there?" McCoy's voice asked.

"Not!" he answered, but McCoy had already entered, followed by Spock.

"So the tomcat's back," said McCoy cheerfully, giving Kirk no time to speak.

"I trust you've enjoyed your unscheduled leave, Captain," added Spock, who did not seem to be angry with him, not at all.

"How are Vulcan women? I've heard they are dynamite under the sheets," McCoy went on, putting his two pence on the matter.

"So have I," confirmed Spock.

"And knowing you," McCoy added diabolically, "she won't forget you..."

Kirk got up from the bed. "Spock... I..." began Kirk. "I'm sorry for what I did to you on the planet... I really do not know what the devil possessed me to do such a disloyal thing to my best friend... But you're a man, too, you know... Sometimes... er... well... in certain circumstances... well... the spirit is willing... but the flesh is weak..." Kirk stopped abruptly as he realised the choice of words he had made.

This was enough for McCoy to burst into savage laughter. Spock valiantly tried to keep his composure, but failed miserably.

"What's so funny?" enquired Kirk, completely at a loss what to think or say.

Neither of them answered; instead, they went on laughing harder than before.

"How long is the effect of the drug?" asked Spock through his laughter.

"Don't know, Spock! Never tested before!"

They were now supporting each other. Spock leaned on the wall and laughed himself out of breath. Kirk looked at them in complete puzzlement. But he did hear the last three words.

"What is it that was 'never tested before'?" he asked.

Both Spock and McCoy fell silent. Kirk repeated the question.

"Nothing," McCoy said hastily.

"Yes," concurred Spock. "Nothing."

Kirk looked at them suspiciously. "You are hiding something from me, aren't you?" He eyed Spock. "Well, there's no way I can force a Vulcan to speak, you know that very well, Spock. But..." He looked at McCoy. "You. You will speak, won't you, Bones?"

McCoy shifted his weight to his right foot, uncomfortably.

"I do know ways which are very painful, but certainly effective. You will tell me everything," said Kirk, savouring his threat and smiling cruelly.

"Jim... please, I..." pleaded the Doctor.

Kirk didn't listen. Instead, he opened a secret door inside his cabinet, reaching for something. "Do you recognise them?" he said, dangling some giant colour holographs in front of the Doctor.

McCoy went crimson red from head to toe. Spock glanced at them, arching one eyebrow. "Fascinating," he said. Then he eyed the Doctor, looking him up and down. "I did not know you had such hidden qualities within yourself," he added, deadpan.

"Shut up!" ordered Kirk. "Will you speak now, or do I have to end these to a specialised magazine?"

McCoy looked at Spock, who sighed then nodded affirmatively.

Kirk sat heavily on the bed, his face pale. "This drug... how long does its effect last?" he asked.

"I don't have the slightest idea. One week... one month... one year... Who knows?"

"One year?!!" he cried. Kirk was silent a long moment then he said, "At least... there is an antidote... yes?" His voice was full of hope.

"Not to my knowledge. As I was - "

"NO ANTIDOTE?" Kirk screamed, fuming.

"... has never been tested before," finished McCoy.

"And what am I? A guinea pig? And what am I supposed to do now?" He spread his arms in desperation.

McCoy and Spock looked at each other. Then McCoy broke the silence.

"Well, it's simple, the only thing you can do is cut - "

"Now you listen, McCoy! I'm not going to cut anything! ANYTHING! No way, Bones! NO WAY!"

"...cut out this activity of yours... for a while. Your health will certainly benefit from that - and also this will give you the chance to finally appreciate all the other things life can offer you."

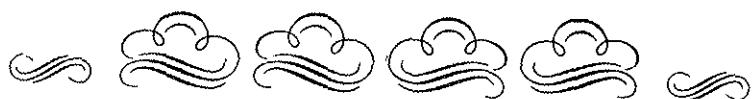
"McCoy..." said Kirk, approaching the Doctor. "Don't force me to say something that will change this story into a X-rated one."

"A healthy walk... the shining sun... a baby's smile... a rose still wet with dew... a golden sunset on the short... the woods... the stars..."

"McCoy!" shouted Kirk.

"The whole Universe, Jim! Isn't that marvellous?"

The Enterprise sailed away...



# CARILLON ENTERPRISE

## OMEGA

by

David Gomm

### Captain's Log Stardate 8201.1

The Enterprise is approaching rendezvous with the USS Intransigent, to take on board a senior member of the Technical Inspectorate, with the acting rank of Enterprise Science Officer. Once the transfer has been made, our orders require us to return to the Mutara Nebula, mission as yet unspecified.

In view of recent history, the effect of this combination of circumstances upon the ship's morale is giving me cause for concern.

### Personal Log Stardate 8291.1: Lt. Saavik

Captain Sulu has informed me that my appointment as Science Officer has not been confirmed. I am to be graded Deputy Science Officer, reporting to a civilian nominee from the Technical Inspectorate.

The Vulcan in my ancestry accepts that my youth precluded my elevation to First Officer, and recognises that the promotion of Lieutenant Commander Pavel Chekov was the logical course, and, as such, most proper.

But the Romulan in me cries out against this new slight, and it will take all of Mr. Spock's patient training to prevent it from being heard.

Oh Spock, why did you leave me so incomplete?

The single transporter pad glowed briefly. Its arriving occupant stood for a moment, blinking in the unaccustomed brightness of the ship's refurbished transporter room, then stepped down.

Captain Sulu saluted formally, his face a mask of impassive oriental politeness. Then, as recognition came, he broke into a most un-oriental grin of delight. And held out his hand.

"Welcome! Welcome aboard! I could hardly believe it when they told me it would be you."

The new-style maroon uniform was different, of course, with its broken double gold bands on the left sleeve, denoting a civilian carrying senior officer status. The mop of light brown hair was a

little shorter, and a lot less unruly, with one or two grey ones keeping discreetly out of their owner's line of vision. But there was no mistaking the look of wistful solemnity, so much at odds with the laughter lurking just below the surface of the blue-grey eyes, and the now-you-see-it-now-you-don't bump at the bridge of the nose was an Enterprise legend. Within minutes, the word had flashed to all quarters of the ship: "Chinwiska's back."

"But why Chinwiska?" ventured one downy-faced junior Ensign, who had still been in primary school when the Enterprise received her first D.S.O. "I thought her name was Kinshaw."

His immediate superior, all of twelve months older and who therefore, of course, knew everything, looked at him pityingly.

"It is," he said. "I thought everybody knew that. 'Chinwiska' was just a nickname. It was the name of her counterpart in 'The Ballad of Saucy Sue' - the space-movie made to deceive the Paxoans into thinking that the Federation was even worse than the Klingons. You must have heard of that?" And as his junior continued to look blank, the lofty nineteen-year-old walked away with a despairing look which said all too clearly, what are young people coming to?

"And how's Michiko?" the new Acting Science Officer asked as she and the Captain sped laterally through the ship in one of the new Rover lifts.

"My - wife is well, thank you. She asked me to thank you for your message of congratulations. And to give you this." He hesitated. "I do not understand what it means."

'This' was an exquisitely simple brooch in the form of a Japanese maiden. On the back it bore the cryptic legend -

'Julius Caesar 2 iv 9'

The A.S.O., who knew perfectly well what it meant, smiled but said nothing. It was common knowledge in Starfleet that the on-off romance between Sulu and the brilliant young Japanese Commodore, Michiko Nissan, had been thwarted more than once by his diffidence concerning their respective ranks. Sulu's promotion to Captain, so that only one rank separated them, provided just enough of a spur. The close-guarded secret of Michiko's imminent elevation to Rear Admiral had not been guarded closely enough to prevent it from reaching the Technical Inspectorate's grapevine. A warning message of:

SILENCE = CONGRATULATIONS

(with the word SILENCE highlighted in gold lettering) flashed over the inter-personal computer link had done the trick; the Japanese brooch was Michiko's way of acknowledging that the message had been understood, and acted upon. Yes, the quotation from Shakespeare was indeed appropriate - but, the A.S.O. reflected, even Michiko had no way of knowing how doubly apt it was, just at this moment.

The bridge had changed, subtly in some ways, less so in others. The faces had changed too; some familiar, although older; some completely new; one bleakly hostile. The burst of excited chatter as old friends were greeted did nothing to alleviate the hostility; on being introduced, Seavik surrendered her station by

the sensor console with the coldest of Vulcan salutes. The A.S.O. suppressed a giggle at the thought of the two-fingered salute Saavik might have liked to give - but the thought was ridiculous; such an emotional gesture would be unthinkable in a Vulcan and Romulans did not waste good vengeance-plotting time on mere vulgar abuse. To lighten the atmosphere, she turned to Chekov and said,

"By the way, Pavel, I saw Spud last week. He wondered if you would remember him."

Chekov grinned boyishly. "Werry well indeed. How is he?"

"Still creating mayhem wherever he goes. Do you remember the time..." But reminiscences of the former Ensign Potato were cut short by Uhura's urgent call of,

"Captain. I have Starfleet. Admiral Riley. Top security channel."

"Thank you, Lieutenant Commander. Please transfer to main screen."

"Hikaru!" Even at many parsecs' distance the faint cloud of pipe smoke which Admiral Jackson Riley seemed to wear like an aura was clearly visible; at sixty nine the Admiral's craggy features were not noticeably craggier than they had been fourteen years earlier, despite countless gloomy forecasts as to the inevitable fate of Starfleet's only heavy smoker. "I can now give you details of your mission."

Sulu waited, stiffly at attention.

"What I am about to tell you is of the utmost secrecy. Admiral Kirk is to head up a new five-year mission. A fleet of ships this time, two squadrons, with a brief to boldly explore not just new worlds but whole new galaxies. One galaxy in particular. The First Galaxy.

"Which means, I'm afraid, that I shall have to deprive you of the Enterprise. She will, of course, be Admiral Kirk's flagship."

Admiral Riley puffed vigorously. The aura around him became a cloud. Sulu waited tensely, well aware of the Admiral's habit of using his pipe as a diversion prior to delivering the punchline. He was not disappointed.

"There is, however, a vacancy for a Flag captain in the second squadron, under the fleet's second-in-command, Rear Admiral Nissan. Would you be interested?"

For the second time that day Sulu's face broke into that broad smile which the former D.S.O. Kinshaw, in more junior days, had described as 'definitely scrutable'. "Yes SIR!"

A wave of barely suppressed excitement rippled around the bridge. A full five-year voyage, with the Captain in command - even now it was hard for old Enterprise hands to think of Jim Kirk as anything but The Captain - and Sulu, Chekov, Scott and Uhura; possibly even Dr. McCoy if he could be persuaded out of yet another threatened retirement. It would be just like old times - except that one missing name hung in the air, unspoken.

"Then that is settled. You will be appointed to command the

USS Reliant as soon as you return to base." Before Sulu could query this startling pronouncement - a slip of the tongue, surely? - Admiral Riley went on. "Now to your immediate mission. Upon arrival in Mutaran space you will proceed to the Genesis Planet and there take aboard Admiral Kirk and Doctors Marcus and Marcus. Admiral Kirk will be transported to Starfleet Command for final briefing. Riley out."

And the screen returned to the ever-moving stars.

"It must have been werry much on his mind," decided Chekov aloud when the babble of speculation had died down. There was no other explanation for the Admiral's extraordinary lapse. Who knew better than he, Chekov, that the USS Reliant was no longer available - except of course 'the Keptin'. Which raised another question, almost as puzzling; what in the name of Mother Russia was Admiral Kirk doing on the Genesis Planet?

Dr. McCoy was asking the self-same question, only much more pithily. "What the heck are we doing in this artificial Garden of Eden?" Not looking where he was going, he bumped into a low-hanging branch. The single ripe apple growing from it fell off and the Doctor caught it deftly. Looking first at the 'Garden of Eden' around him, then at the huge apple in his hand, he exploded into grumpy laughter. "Dammit, I'm a doctor, not a serpent!" To prove it, he took a huge bite at the apple.

"If you want a reason, Bones - " Jim Kirk smiled, an almost mischievous smile - "just look in front of you. In fact, you're eating it."

McCoy gulped down his third bite of apple whole.

"Must you talk in riddles? You're getting as bad as Spock." He choked, as much on his unfortunate choice of words as on the unchewed apple. But, he noted with concern, Kirk merely shrugged. The casual way in which Kirk had accepted the death of his old friend in the radiation flux had alarmed his friends and admirers alike. Was the mask of indifference a symptom of an impending crack-up, or had a hitherto unsuspected streak of callousness only now manifested itself? It was McCoy's duty to find out which, if either, was the case.

"Doesn't anything about that apple strike you as unusual?" Kirk continued speaking as if he had not even heard McCoy's reference to Spock. The Doctor brought his concentration back to the fruit in front of him. Taking another bite, he chewed it thoroughly, tasting it properly for the first time. A half-remembered description came back to him: *The juiciness of a cider apple combined with the sweetness of a Cox. The crispness of a Granny Smith with the size and all-round deliciousness of that rarest of apples, the Blenheim Orange.* Then it clicked.

"By God, Jim," he almost exploded. "It's a Vulcan apple."

This raised even more disturbing possibilities. Was Jim deluded with the idea that Spock was somehow reincarnated in the flora and fauna of this planet?

"Exactly, Bones. The special hybrid pippin bred on Vulcan as one of the few Terran life forms considered worthy of importation."

"But the Genesis experiment was supposed to create a new Earth - not a new Vulcan."

"So everyone was led to believe. But that apple is not of any Terran type, nor is the grass, nor the animal life. And certainly not - " by not so much as the lifting of an eyebrow did Kirk betray awareness of the fact that they had suddenly been surrounded by Neanderthal bipeds, whose pointed ears peeped grotesquely through filthy mattings of unkempt black hair - "those."

Lieutenant Saavik could scarcely bring herself to speak to Pavel Chekov. To one who had suffered as she had suffered, the gross betrayal of his comrades for no better reason than a squiddley little eel was beneath contempt. And to make matters worse he persisted in attempting to - what was that disgusting Earth expression - chat her up. But if there was one lesson she had learned early in life, it was know your enemy. She meant to know everything about this Technical Inspectorate Officer who seemed to be revered on the Enterprise almost as much as - she forced herself to think the name - Spock himself. Deputy Science Officer Kinshaw's three closest friends on the Enterprise had been Sulu, Chekov and Janice Rand. Sulu was too senior, and in his way too remote, to be pumped about her, while Janice Rand was now Transporter Chief on Starbase 1. Which left - Chekov.

"Of course," he was saying, "we'll all have to be re-tested before the new five-year mission. All the Command grades."

"The Kobayashi Maru?"

Chekov shrugged. "Maybe. Maybe not. The K.M. is getting too well known. And since the Kep - Admiral Kirk beat it there have been rumours of a new test for senior ranks. One with a built-in random factor so that it is impossible to cheat it."

"And everyone will have to take it? Even - " Saavik threw the nickname casually, almost irreverently, into the conversation - "Chinwiska?"

Chekov laughed. "She probably wrote it."

"Why do you say that?"

Chekov hardly seemed to hear her. "Has anyone ever told you how werry beautiful is your hair?"

Saavik froze.

"Never more than once," she said icily. Realising that this was not the moment for a put-down, she laughed it off. "Usually they add a joke about my ears pointing the way through it. That is when I demonstrate the Romulan Death Grip. Go on with what you were saying."

Even Chekov seemed momentarily lost for words. "What was I saying?"

"About why my Chief probably re-programmed the Kobayashi Maru test."

"Oh, yes. Well, use of the random element - contra-logic, she

used to call it - was always her speciality. Did you never hear of the Carillon Effect? The trick she used to outwit the Peregrine?"

Saavik smiled tigerishly.

"Tell me about it."

The Deputy Science Officer's battle station is in the Central Processing Unit of the main computer bank, in a securely protected compartment between the Transporter Room and the Engineering Section Proper. Making sure she was not seen, Saavik slipped through the door and activated the electronic locking device. She had no inkling that her every move was being monitored on the bridge.

The A.S.O. watched her junior intently. She had been given the clue - good old Pavel - now what would she do with it? There was, of course, the risk that Saavik would do nothing, or even erase the Carillon program completely. The A.S.O. fervently hoped that she would do nothing of the kind. That would be a waste of so much raw talent - the A.S.O. smiled at the thought, which was, as she herself might have said, 'very Spocky'.

Saavik initiated the voice-print control mode.

"Computer. Give resume of program Carillon."

"Working." There was a few seconds' delay as the computer searched back fourteen years. "Carillon Effect. Artificially produced random thought pattern, designed to confuse enemy computer system."

"Elaborate."

"Computer-generated subliminal personality transference. The transference lasts for less than 3.961 nanoseconds per pulse. Highly effective against enemy Logical Performance Monitoring but insufficient to hamper ship's own performance. Symptoms: most frequently observed symptom is a Carillon-pattern interchange of personal phraseology. The effect was first demonstrated on Stardate 5920.3 by -"

"Enough," Saavik cut in sharply. "Do you have a demonstration available?"

"Of course." The shortest of waits. "Ready."

"Execute."

Despite herself, Saavik watched the monitor enthralled as Uhura solemnly assured Chekov that the negro spiritual had been invented by a little old lady in Leningrad.

"Fascinating!" she exclaimed. And, as an involuntary afterthought, "Isn't it just!"

It was, she found, a most weird experience. During the voyage to Mutara she had had ample exposure to her new Chief's pet expressions, but the sensation of standing outside herself, listening to herself speaking someone else's lines, left her in no doubt that she had just encountered the Carillon Effect at first hand.

And then the black hairs on the nape of her neck stood on end as she realised with a start that the outside-looking-in feeling had commenced when she uttered the word 'fascinating'.

Lt. Saavik settled down to some very hard thinking.

Two hours later she had the answers. She knew why she had spoken with Spock's voice, and how Spock's mind came to be active and alive in the vicinity of the Genesis planet. Best of all, she knew how Mr. Spock could be recovered in physical form. There was only one teeth-grinding snag. Putting the theoretical solution into practice called for a computer specialist, not a pure scientist.

Conflicting emotions fought their lonely battle. Then Lt. Saavik punched the intercom button.

"Saavik to bridge."

"Pure fantasy, lassie."

The A.S.O. had taken remarkably little convincing, although she had raised her eyebrows, Spock-style, when her subordinate confessed to having accessed the Carillon program. But Mr. Scott, whose permission was needed before the computer could be interfaced with the transporter circuits, was proving much more sceptical.

"It's true, Scotty, it really is." The A.S.O. leaned forward earnestly. "I've felt it for myself. Mr. Spock's mind, persona, soul, call it what you like, is somewhere in the vicinity of this ship."

"Aye, weel, that's as may be. I think you're deluding yourselves, but even if you're right there's a wealth of difference between contacting a disembodied spirit and resurrecting a dead body - a three-month cadaver at that - even if we could find it. Dammit, I'm an engine-doctor, not a faith healer. Guid Lord!"

"You see!" the A.S.O. exclaimed triumphantly. "That was Dr. McCoy. The Carillon field has touched him, and he's on the surface of the planet, barely within transporter range."

"Aye, he is. Alive and well. But a scheme which parallels the routine transportation of a living entity with the metaphysical reincarnation of an incarnate spirit is illogical and devoid of any foundation in practicability."

"In other words, it can't be done," said Saavik contemptuously.

"I believe I said that, Lieutenant." Scott performed an even mightier double take than Saavik's own. "Saints presairve us!"

The A.S.O. pressed home her advantage. "Explain your theory again, Lieutenant."

Saavik took a deep breath and tried again.

"When Mr. Spock was - dying - in the radiation flux, the Enterprise was already in the grip of the Genesis wave. It was the registering of the wave on our sensors that alerted us to the danger we were in."

"My contention is that a wholly exceptional mind such as Mr. Spock's, coming under the threat of total physical annihilation, would cast around for some means of salvation. In doing so, it somehow disrupted the master helix of the Genesis code pattern. This would explain the rumours about the Genesis planet having taken on Vulcan characteristics, when it was supposed to be one hundred percent Terraform."

"The Genesis field is still alive. Even at its present muted level, the regeneration of a single entity would be well within its capacity. It should be - "

"Kids's stuff!" In her eagerness, the A.S.O. was showing flashes of the girl of Saavik's age who had joined the Enterprise fourteen years before. "I - we've adapted Carillon so that the random element can be switched out, concentrating on Spock alone. Now we link up with the Genesis wave and patch the whole thing into the transporter's search program."

Mr. Scott, not without difficulty, raised one eyebrow.

"Aye," he said. "That would be logical."

The work went smoothly, with the A.S.O. happily ensconced in her old station in the C.P.U. Room, leaving Saavik and Mr. Scott to concentrate on the complex transporter engineering. In less than an hour everything was ready. The three of them gathered in the transporter room and dismissed the duty technician; the fewer witnesses to this, Scott reflected, the better.

"Ready?"

"Ready as we'll ever be, lass."

The A.S.O. nodded to Saavik, who said, not entirely steadily, "Energise." The transporter pad glowed, misted, swirled and finally cleared.

Revealing two round green apples, two incredibly phallic cucumber-like gourds - and two tall pointed ears of corn.

The village consisted of a circle of stone huts, barely tall enough for an average Human to enter without stooping. That, McCoy decided, was probably one reason why the locals preferred to stay outside. Another must be the hovels' smell, which was appalling. But there was a third, more pressing reason. In the centre of the circle of huts was a lightning-blasted tree stump, some four feet high. Bound to it, hand and foot, were Drs. Carol and David Marcus. The villagers were clustered round a group of three figures, who seemed to represent authority.

The oldest of the trio was clearly the village headman. On his left was a huge muscular individual who would have borne a marked facial resemblance to Spock had it not been for his grotesque ears; a bruiser's cauliflower ears which, being pointed, looked like two sharpened loofahs. He was carrying a wickedly curved sword, a cross between a scimitar and a sickle.

The third and tallest was dressed in skins, as were all the Vulcanderthals, but still made an imposing figure. His skins were less filthy than the rest, and even a little less aromatic. They

had been coloured with smears of primitive dyestuffs, blue and red and, incongruously, a dirty turquoise. His manner was haughty and sneering, and Kirk had met his type before. Everything about him said 'High Priest'.

"Who dares to defile the Sowing Time?"

Rough hands forced Kirk and McCoy to a kneeling position.

Kirk thought on his feet, or, to be exact, his kneecaps. After the briefest of you don't know us glances at Carol Marcus, he said,

"Your Honour, we come in peace from - a far place. We too are priests and have come to beseech Your Honour to share with us the mystic knowledge whereby your land is made fertile and your crops healthy and strong."

The priest's sneer deepened.

"What kind of place is this whose priests know not that the blood of the Earth Mother T'Pon and her servant S'Far'k shall be returned at the Sowing Time to the soil from whence it sprang?"

"Jim," hissed McCoy under his breath, "this must be the origin of pon farr."

Kirk had already deduced that much for himself. He contrived to look bewildered. "But where is your Champion? And He-who-fights-on-the-side-of-Darkness? For as Your Honour must surely know, the blood of the Earth Mother shall poison the very soil unless it be first won in hand-to-hand combat. Unarmed combat," he added hastily, with a sidelong glance at the great curved sword.

Doubt, fleeting but unmistakeable, flitted across the High Priest's face. *I was right*, thought Kirk to himself. These people, created intact only months previously, had no traditions or experiences of their own to guide them. They were acting out an embedded race memory, millions of years old, from a world countless light years away. All they could do when confronted with the unexpected was to play it by ear. He caught sight of the bruiser's twin loofahs. *Don't Laugh*, he told himself sternly. *Whatever you do, don't laugh!*

Any thoughts he might have entertained of a re-run of his epic pon farr battle with Spock were rudely swept aside. Swept along with Kirk himself, as the High Priest said, "It is time", and Spockderthal brushed him out of the way with one stroke of his mighty paw. Then before either of the new captives could cry out in protest, Spockderthal raised his sword aloft and swished it expertly, at a single blow, through the necks of both Doctors Marcus.

Saavik stared dumbly at the greengrocery on the transporter pad. She had been so sure! Her mind flashed once again through her calculations, reviewing every step and re-examining every detail of her work on the transporter circuits. Had she made an error? Had she been mistaken all along? Suppose - awful thought - suppose Mr. Spock had been already embodied, as the total flora and fauna of the Genesis planet. Or - worse thought still - had she simply been made a fool of?

Then from behind her came the shaking, gurgling sound of unsuccessfully suppressed laughter. And Saavik knew.

"I'm sorry," gasped the A.S.O., when she could trust herself to speak. "That was unpardonable. But - those cucumbers - you should have seen your face!"

Saavik, fists clenched so that her nails bit deep into her palms (*I won't give her the satisfaction of seeing me angry*) said: "And now you will tell all Starfleet how you made the Romulan a laughing stock."

"On the contrary, Lieutenant." The A.S.O. had herself back under full control. "I intend to tell Starfleet that your appointment as Enterprise Science Officer should be confirmed."

"A recommendation, Lieutenant COMMANDER," said Spock from behind them, "which I shall be most happy to endorse."

Years of patient training in the control of emotions flew out of the viewing port.

"Mr. Spock!" cried Saavik. "You're alive!"

"Evidently," agreed Spock, "since I am here. As I was about to observe, I believe you will make a most excellent Science Officer - once you have eliminated a regrettable tendency to overlook the obvious."

"The obvious?"

"Your conclusions regarding the effect of the interaction between my mind and the Genesis wave were exemplary in their logic. Had I indeed died as a result of exposure to the radiation flux, it would undoubtedly have been possible to reincarnate me in the manner you described. But since the Carillon is primarily a localised effect, the most logical explanation of its picking up my thought patterns was not that I was dead and outside the ship, but alive and aboard it. As I have been for several hours."

"But you died," said Saavik, bewildered. "I saw you." Then, as first one eyebrow and then the other slanted steeply upwards, "No, wait." She thought the problem through. "Yes, that's it. If the Genesis were correctly programmed in advance, it would regenerate your cell structure millions of times faster than the radiations flux could degrade it. You wouldn't have been in the least danger in the reactor room. You wouldn't even have been uncomfortable. But -" Bewilderment again. "- that means that - someone knew you would be there."

Spock ignored the implied question.

"A most lucid exposition, Lieutenant Commander," he said. "And, of course, entirely correct."

Scott's eyes twinkled.

"Aye, Mr. Spock," he said. "That takes care of the how. But I'm thinking that what the lassie really wants to know is - why!"

never came. The sword sliced clean as a whistle through the residual afterglow of a hurriedly-used transporter.

Spockderthal looked at the empty air where his victims had been standing and at the blasted tree stump with the redundant leather thongs draped loosely around its base. Not liking what he saw, he scratched himself intimately to give himself time to think, and looked again. Finding nothing changed, he turned and looked for alternative victims, only to find that they too had vanished, albeit less spectacularly. The magical disappearance of Carol Marcus and her son had so astonished their captors that both Kirk and McCoy had been able to wriggle free and make a dash for the trees. Spockderthal, sword brandished aloft, set off in hot pursuit.

"If you've still got your communicator, Bones," panted Kirk, whose own had been taken from him, "now's the time to use it."

"McCoy to Scimitar." The Doctor was way ahead of him. "Get us out of here."

"The Enterprise is within transporter range, Doctor," the Scimitar's transporter chief said calmly. "We're transporting you directly to her."

McCoy wasn't feeling calm. The grunting breath and crashing footsteps of Spockderthal were now very close.

"I don't care where you send us, Mister," he growled. "Just do it. NOW!"

Before Spock could reply, the intercom beeped.

"Bridge to transporter room."

Spock pressed the response button. "Spock here."

The A.S.O. smiled to herself at the thought of the pandemonium those two words must have caused on the bridge. But Uhura was a professional to her fingertips.

"Signal from Scimitar, sir. Two to beam up Immediately."

"Very good, Lieutenant Commander. Spock out." He turned to Saavik, who was still at the transporter controls. "Energise."

Jim Kirk and Dr. Leonard McCoy arrived back on the Enterprise, still running.

McCoy was so intent on his communicator that he failed to notice that things had changed, and fell sprawling on the transporter room floor. Kirk stopped running, looked calmly around him and said in the most matter-of-fact of voices, "Hello, there, Mr. Spock." Then he turned, helped McCoy to his feet and said nonchalantly, "Well, Bones, did I pass?"

McCoy spluttered.

"How in tarnation did you know - ?"

"That I was under test? Simple." Kirk lowered his voice to a conspiratorial whisper. "You told me."

"I told you?"

Kirk decided that it was time to stop, before his friend had an apoplectic fit.

"Bones, I've seen the despair on your face when you've looked up after losing a patient and said, "He's dead, Jim." I've also seen that magnificent piece of ham you put on for the benefit of the Kobayashi Maru trainees. 'Uhura - Uhura - OH MY GOD!', " he whispered, by way of illustration. "I've seen them both so often that I would feel quite insulted if you really thought I couldn't tell the difference. And your reaction to Spock's 'death' was pure Kobayashi Maru!"

"I admit I was fooled up to that point, but once I smelled the first rat there were twitching whiskers everywhere. The clincher was when I remembered Michiko - Commodore Nissan she was then - telling me that she'd already had to retake Kobayashi Maru in preparation for our new long mission. Then I remembered that the Technical Inspectorate was responsible for programming the new Personnel Tests - and I knew."

All eyes swivelled to the A.S.O.

"Guilty," she admitted cheerfully. "But it was your own fault, Admiral. Your success at cheating K.M. had become too well known. My boss told me to dream up a new test program - one which could carry out multiple tests at once and with a built-in random element so you couldn't cheat it. Then Dr. Marcus came to me with a quite different problem. I lost a lot of sleep over that, until I realised that I could kill two birds with one stone."

Saavik looked at her chief open-mouthed. Spock saw her.

"Don't worry, Lieutenant Commander," he said. "These Terran colloquialisms can be quite unnerving at first - but one does become inured to them - " (with a sidelong glance at McCoy). "In time."

"Ladies and gentlemen." Admiral Kirk called the meeting to order. "I have been asked by Captain Spock to remind you that what you are about to hear is still classified."

At Spock's suggestion, further explanations had been postponed until the ship's senior officers could be gathered together in Number One Briefing Room. It would, he had pointed out, be illogical to repeat his story twice, and then a third time for the Confidential Log.

"As many of you are already aware," he began when the computer had confirmed 'Secret Log - recording', "the Genesis project was designed to simulate the original process of planetary creation, but at a development rate of some 3.491 times 10 to the 9th power that of the original.

"The intention was to produce an Earth-type planet and all the original programming was carried out to this end. But then there occurred a catastrophe of galactic proportions."

"Tau Beta III," murmured Sulu.

"Quite correct, Captain Sulu."

"Was that the planet whose inhabitants destroyed themselves with a nuclear holocaust?"

"They did more than destroy themselves, Mr. Chekov. The destruction of Tau Baie III was so cataclysmic that the parent star Tau Baie was itself affected. The resulting flares and radiation storms were sufficient to erase all sentient life forms from the next innermost planet, Tau Baie II. Among the species lost was a race of hermaphrodite gastropods with an intellectual potential as high, if not higher than, that of the Serpents of Paxo.

"It happens that we are aware of two other instances where there is danger of the same thing occurring. It would, of course, be perfectly possible to prevent the aggressive worlds' self-destruction - by force if need be - were it not for the Prime Directive. With this in mind, and at my suggestion, Starfleet approached the Paxo Serpents, who gave their collective mind to the problem and its ethical implications.

"Their conclusion was that failure to prevent the destruction of the innocent when we had the means to do so was itself a violation of the Prime Directive, in that by allowing them to die we interfered most effectively and most finally with their natural development. To this paradox there appeared to be no answer, until Sarek, my father, postulated the existence of the Vulcan Factor.

"All intelligent races with the physical attributes necessary for tool-making have the potential for self-destruction, since in the early stages of any planet's development conditions are so hostile that aggression becomes an in-bred survival mechanism. Vulcan was no exception - in our pre-history we were as warlike as any and more barbarous than most. Yet for some reason which is lost in the dawn of history we were able to put this phase behind us. We eschewed emotion for logic, violence for reason.

"The point is that this change came about far, far earlier in our development than could logically be expected. My father's view was that if the reason for this early enlightenment could be identified it might provide a means of diverting future Tau Baie IIIs from ruining themselves and others with a minimum of actual physical interference. It was therefore decided at the highest level to reprogram Genesis to simulate not a new Earth but a new Vulcan. And I, with my unique ancestry, was seconded to the project, under conditions of absolute secrecy."

"Which was where I came in." The A.S.O. was fidgeting excitedly in her seat. "T.I. was already involved in the Genesis work. When Carol Marcus came to me and asked if I could find a way to 'kill off' Mr. Spock temporarily, I knew I'd found my new Kobayashi Maru!"

"Then we were ALL under test!" exclaimed Sulu. "Every one of us?"

"Except Dr. McCoy and Scotty, yes. It couldn't have been done without their help. Incidentally, Saavik, it may interest you to know that Mr. Scott has no fourteen-year-old nephew. My fourteen-year-old nephew sends his apologies, and his love, and said to tell you that he's back in college and still trying to decide whether to be an engineer or an actor!"

"But the worm?" Chekov's face contorted as he remembered the horror of those moments.

"Yes. I'm sorry about that, Pavel. That wasn't my idea. Though Ceti eels are such an old myth I'm surprised you still believe in them. Dr. Carlough, who impersonated Khan Singh - he's really the Genesis Astrobiologist - came up with a little creature called a Betelgeuse Lugworm. It's only a couple of millimetres long, but it can puff itself up like a balloon to several times its normal size. That's one of its defence mechanisms. The other is to dig its way into any piece of soft superfluous flesh. An ear lobe, for instance. And, of course, when it leaves the lobe and starts expanding, the victim bleeds like a stuck pig. But it never goes near the brain, so you were in no danger - or even pain. That was just a hypnotically induced memory."

"And the real Khan Singh?" Uhura couldn't resist asking.

"Dead. Along with all his people. Apparently they had been partially thawed, due to a malfunction of the Botany Bay's systems, then frozen again. A few weeks after you put them ashore on Alpha Ceti they just - went bad."

"What about McGiver?" Jim Kirk had always had misgivings about allowing the comely dark-haired Lieutenant to share Khan's exile.

"That's who I got the story from, Admiral. I ran across her last year in London. She was being towed by two sets of twins and an Irish wolf hound. When Khan died she hitched a lift to Earth on a passing freighter."

There was a short silence, which lasted until it was broken by Dr. McCoy.

"So you won't be coming with us on the new mission, Spock? We'll be able to enjoy five gloriously illogical years."

"On the contrary, Doctor. My projections show that the critical phase in the Genesis Planet's development will occur in 5.6482 Earth years. Which even your mathematics will tell you means that I shall return from the mission with 236 days, 17 hours, 46 minutes and - seven seconds to spare."

"And what if your calculations are wrong, Spock. Have you thought of that?"

Eyebrows lifted by the merest fraction.

"My calculations are never wrong, Doctor. Approximate - but never wrong."

Something was bothering Saavik. Turning to the A.S.O., she said, "But if Captain Spock is resuming command and I am to be confirmed as Science Officer - what will be your position?"

The A.S.O.'s face took on the wistful expression which two Enterprise crews had come to know so well. She shook her head regretfully. "Too many calls on my time these days. I managed to wangle this one commission, but five years - no chance. Besides -" In an atrocious American accent - "dis ship ain't big enough fer both of us."

Uhura stared at her in blank amazement. "Since the ship can comfortably carry five hundred, Inspector, your statement would appear to be highly - illogical." Then she did a classic Carillon double-take, laughed and made great play of searching the tops of

her ears for points.

"The Carillon program!" Saavik gasped guiltily. "I've left it running."

"Then may I suggest you go and turn it off, Lieutenant Commander."

"Better do as the Admiral says," the A.S.O. confirmed. "Although - it's been nice to hear my old program at work again."

"Your program!" Saavik sounded indignant. "Why, everyone knows that the Carillon was invented by a little old lady in Moscow."

The A.S.O. caught Spock's eye.

"On second thoughts, perhaps it does go on a bit."

It had taken Mr. Spock fourteen long years to get his own back.

"Doesn't it just!" he agreed gravely.

(Not quite)

THE END

#### EPILOGUE...

**Captain's Epilogue Stardate 8251.7**

Admiral James T. Kirk recording.

#### **MOST SECRET**

Our new five-year mission, to the First Galaxy, home of the mysterious USS Peregrine, is about to begin.

News of the existence of a life form so far superior to ourselves is still cloaked in the utmost secrecy, for fear that its premature release might cause panic on a galactic scale.

Accordingly, the following decisions have been taken at the Paramount level of Starfleet Command.

- i. The Genesis Planet has been reported destroyed, and the Mutara Nebula declared a prohibited zone, in order to permit Dr. Carol Marcus and her team to bring the project to fruition undisturbed. Dr. David Marcus has been released in order to join the First Galaxy expedition as Chief Astrobiologist.
- ii. The Enterprise has also been reported destroyed, following an encounter with the Klingons. Her crew, with the exception of Dr. David Marcus, have 'survived', although details of their whereabouts are purposely being kept vague at this time. Further 'news' of their continuing adventures will be leaked as and when appropriate...

"Kirk to Reliant."

The Flag Captain's smiling face appeared on the main screen.  
"Sulu here, Cap - Admiral!"

"Ahead, Mr. Sulu. All ships. Warp factor one."

